

Welcome to This Week's Asia on the Horizon

(13 OCTOBER 2025)

This week's issue of Asia on the Horizon unfolds at a moment when the Indo-Pacific is not just reacting to global events but increasingly setting the pace of change. Across the region, long-standing relationships are being redefined, strategic alignments are tightening, and new channels of cooperation are emerging in places once marked by distance or distrust. The stories we bring you this week reveal an Asia that is recalibrating its priorities — from defense and diplomacy to trade and technology — with far-reaching implications for global politics and the balance of power.

At the forefront, Vietnam's landmark diplomatic outreach to North Korea has drawn considerable attention. In a rare high-level visit, Vietnam's Communist Party chief Tô Lâm met with Kim Jong Un in Pyongyang, the first such engagement in nearly two decades. The two sides signed cooperation agreements across defense, foreign affairs, and health — a symbolic yet meaningful affirmation that Hanoi is capable of independent statecraft amid great-power rivalries. While the visit underscores historical ties rooted in socialist solidarity, it also represents a pragmatic maneuver by Vietnam to keep its diplomatic posture balanced between Beijing, Washington, and Moscow.

Meanwhile, the United Kingdom and India have turned a long-courted partnership into a fully fledged strategic alliance. Prime Minister Keir Starmer's visit to India this month — his first since taking office — marked a milestone in UK-India relations, cemented by the recently concluded Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement. The deal, worth an estimated £42 billion in bilateral trade, promises to deepen cooperation in digital innovation, defense production, and green technology. The two governments also announced expanded defense partnerships, including a joint naval propulsion project and the delivery of new missile systems to the Indian armed forces.

Elsewhere, China has intensified its strategic signaling through two major moves that reverberated far beyond its borders. First, Beijing announced expanded export controls on rare earth elements, adding new categories of minerals and processing technologies to its restricted list. With China accounting for nearly half the world's known reserves and over 80% of global refining capacity, the decision underscores its leverage over critical supply chains powering electric vehicles, semiconductors, and defense systems. Second, Chinese diplomacy remained in the spotlight as Premier Li Qiang's visit to Pyongyang reaffirmed Beijing's enduring alliance with North Korea at a time of growing trilateral coordination with Moscow. In our Map of the Week, we visualize China's resource dominance, and in our Photo of the Week, we capture the symbolic power of high-level engagement — a visual reminder that China's influence is being expressed not only through trade and technology but also through regional outreach and shared ideology.

The Indo-Pacific's maritime theater was no less dynamic. Our Photo of the Week features the Royal Navy's HMS Prince of Wales and India's INS Vikrant conducting dual-carrier operations in the Arabian Sea — the first such exercise in both nations' history. The sight of the two carriers sailing in formation epitomizes the growing cooperation between European and Asian partners determined to uphold freedom of navigation and an open, rules-based order at sea. The exercise comes as the UK reasserts its "Global Britain" role through tangible defense partnerships, while India solidifies its position as the anchor of regional security in the Indian Ocean. Together, these moves demonstrate how traditional naval diplomacy is being reborn as a key instrument of twenty-first-century statecraft.

This week also saw Australia and Singapore convene a high-level bilateral meeting that blended regional security discussions with digital and energy cooperation, Malaysia's proactive diplomacy in Myanmar as ASEAN chair pushing the bloc's peace roadmap, and India's first-ever aerial cargo mission to Antarctica, which reflects New Delhi's expanding scientific and logistical reach. Meanwhile, Taiwan's unveiling of its "T-Dome" multi-layered air defense system marks a new stage in its deterrence strategy amid increasing Chinese military pressure. Each of these developments underscores a common regional thread — the determination to secure autonomy, resilience, and relevance in a landscape increasingly shaped by competition among major powers.

In our Statistics of the Week, we highlight the surge of UK–India trade, which reached an all-time high of £42.6 billion in 2024, driven by robust growth in goods, services, and technological collaboration. Our Map of the Week details China's control over global rare earth reserves, providing critical context for its tightening export regime. And in our Photo of the Week, the image of the Prince of Wales and Vikrant sailing together serves as a vivid emblem of transregional partnership in action.

Finally, our Regional Alliances and Analysis sections delve into the deeper undercurrents driving these transformations. "Vietnam's Quiet Reinforcement of DPRK Ties" examines the diplomatic logic behind Hanoi's engagement with Pyongyang, while "The UK–India Strategic Pivot" explores how London and New Delhi are jointly defining a post-Brexit Indo-Pacific vision. Together, they provide a panoramic view of how alliances old and new are being recalibrated across Asia — balancing ideology, pragmatism, and ambition.

As always, Asia on the Horizon brings you the developments that matter most — not just as a digest of weekly news, but as a window into the ideas, partnerships, and rivalries that will shape the region's future. Whether through defense diplomacy, economic interdependence, or ideological renewal, Asia is asserting its agency on the world stage — and this week's edition captures that dynamic story in full.



1. KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Vietnam Deepens Ties with Pyongyang via Strategic Cooperation Agreements

Vietnam's Communist Party chief Tô Lâm has embarked on a high-profile visit to North Korea from October 9 to 11, marking the first such trip by a Vietnamese top leader since 2007. The schedule aligns with a major military parade in Pyongyang on October 10 celebrating the 80th anniversary of North Korea's ruling party, a spectacle that will include a display of North Korea's new Hwasong-20 intercontinental ballistic missile. During the visit, state media reports that Hanoi and Pyongyang have agreed to new cooperation pacts covering defence, foreign affairs, and health sectors. While details remain opaque, the visit is being interpreted as Vietnam's effort to recalibrate its historical ties with North Korea in the evolving strategic landscape of East Asia.

In a landmark move, Australia and Papua New Guinea have formalized a mutual defence pact known as the Pukpuk Treaty, marking Canberra's first new alliance in over seven decades and Papua New Guinea's inaugural security treaty. Under the treaty, both nations are obligated to assist each other if either is attacked, and it also allows as many as 10,000 Papua New Guineans to serve in the Australian Defence Force under dual arrangements. The agreement, which still requires parliamentary ratification in both countries, is widely seen as part of Australia's strategy to counterbalance China's growing influence in the Pacific theater.

Starmer's India Visit Kicks Off "Launchpad" Era in UK–India Economic Relations

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer embarked on his first official visit to India on October 8–9, bringing with him a delegation of more than 100 business, academic, and cultural leaders — the largest trade mission ever sent from the UK to India. In meetings with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Mumbai, Starmer hailed the July 2025 free trade agreement as a "launchpad" for closer cooperation, while both leaders underscored that the visit was as much about deepening strategic ties as it was about unlocking immediate economic gains.

While the trade deal provides a structural foundation, supplemental initiatives are signaling a broader ambition. During the visit, UK and Indian officials announced that 64 Indian firms would invest £1.3 billion in the UK, affirming the deal's promise to catalyze capital flows. The partners also reiterated plans for joint initiatives in technology sectors — including discussions over a connectivity and innovation center and a shared AI hub. However, Starmer clarified that the UK is not actively pushing for a visa liberalization package as part of the deal — a potential nod to domestic political constraints — even while his government seeks to maximize gains from trade, investment, and strategic alignment.

India Executes First-Ever Direct Airlift to Antarctica, Bypassing Maritime Routes

On October 2, India chartered a Russian Ilyushin IL-76 cargo aircraft to deliver 18 tonnes of scientific equipment, medicines, and essential provisions directly to its Antarctic outposts — Bharati and Maitri. This marks India's inaugural direct air cargo mission to Antarctica, departing from Goa's Manohar International Airport via Cape Town and leveraging the DROMLAN (Dronning Maud Land Air Network) logistical framework. Until now, India's Antarctic logistics depended entirely on sea shipments — often taking 40 days or more and subject to delays, permitting bottlenecks, and supply chain disruptions.

By executing this airlift, India is carving out greater autonomy over its polar supply chains, reducing vulnerability to maritime delays and external dependencies. The IL-76 — with rugged landing gear, low-pressure tires, and capacity for icy blue-ice runways — is well-suited to Antarctic operations and underscores India's technological and logistical ambition. Notably, the mission also deepens India–Russia cooperation in strategic domains, as New Delhi taps Moscow's aviation capabilities to extend its scientific reach to the southernmost continent. With the Antarctic region emerging as a site of scientific, environmental, and strategic interest, this milestone signals India's intent to play a more self-reliant and high-stakes role in polar affairs.

Taipei Warns: A Chinese Takeover of Taiwan Would Implicate U.S. Homeland Security

In a striking interview with a U.S. conservative radio show, Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te argued that any attempt by Beijing to seize Taiwan would transcend regional dynamics — it would pose a direct threat to U.S. homeland interests. He warned that a Chinese takeover would embolden Beijing internationally, undermining the rules-based order and increasing pressure on Washington to respond. Lai also tied the warning to his appeal for U.S. support, saying that Taiwan's security is integrally linked to broader Indo-Pacific stability and that Washington should uphold peace under its treaty ties to the region.

The warning comes amid intensified Chinese military activity across the Taiwan Strait, with Taiwan's defense ministry reporting increased “hybrid warfare” tactics and elevated readiness for a surprise attack. In his National Day address, Lai unveiled plans for a multi-layered air defense system (dubbed “T-Dome”/Taiwan Dome) and pledged to raise Taiwan's defense budget significantly, with a goal of 5 percent of GDP by 2030. The reforms are intended to deter Beijing via credible defensive strength, reinforcing Taiwan's stance that its survival is inseparable from U.S. strategic interests in the region.

EU Pushes Back on Beijing's Legal Narrative Over Taiwan

The European Union on October 7 issued a pointed clarification concerning U.N. General Assembly Resolution 2758, stating that the 1971 decision **solely addressed a shift in representation at the U.N. — from the “representatives of Chiang Kai-shek” to the People’s Republic of China — and does not mention “Taiwan” or address the island’s status. This rebuttal comes amid growing tensions over China’s invocation of the resolution as a purported legal basis for asserting sovereignty over Taiwan. Beijing has long treated 2758 as validating its “One China” principle, while Taipei and key Western partners reject that linkage.

The EU also emphasized that, as a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, China bears a special responsibility to uphold the U.N. Charter — including prohibitions on the use of force and maintaining international peace and security. The statement underscores a subtle but meaningful shift in European engagement: while no EU state formally recognizes Taiwan, the bloc is willing to contest Chinese reinterpretations of international law. In response, Beijing criticized the EU’s remarks as a “distortion” and urged Brussels to respect the One-China principle — hinting at an intensifying diplomatic standoff over how foundational U.N. texts are read and deployed in the Taiwan dispute.

Kim Pledges to Deepen Pyongyang–Moscow Alliance Amid Ukraine War

In a birthday letter to Russian President Vladimir Putin, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un declared his intent to further strengthen the alliance between North Korea and Russia, describing the relationship as grounded in “warm friendly relations and close comradely ties.” Kim reaffirmed his support for Russia’s “just struggle” for national sovereignty — a likely allusion to Moscow’s campaign in Ukraine — and pledged continued adherence to the comprehensive strategic treaty signed between the two last year.

The message signals that Pyongyang views its relationship with Moscow as a pillar of its external posture and a counterbalance to Western pressure. By emphasizing treaty obligations and rhetorical solidarity, Kim is reinforcing a narrative of mutual resistance and geopolitical continuity. This comes against the backdrop of North Korea’s increasingly active role in supporting Russia — through military assistance, munitions supply, and possibly troop deployments in Ukraine — which Western and East Asian analysts see as a deepening Russian-North Korean strategic enterprise.

Australia and Singapore Deepen Strategic Ties Amid Shared Digital and Security Agendas

Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong paid his first official visit to Australia on October 8, meeting with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in Canberra for the Annual Leaders' Meeting and the Joint Ministerial Conference (JMC). The visit reaffirmed both nations' commitment to the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) — a framework covering defense, trade, climate transition, and digital governance. Albanese hailed Singapore as “a key and trusted partner in the region,” emphasizing shared priorities in renewable energy cooperation, critical minerals supply chains, and the green economy transition. Wong likewise highlighted Australia's role as a strategic partner in ensuring regional stability, economic resilience, and climate action.

Both leaders announced plans to deepen defence collaboration, including enhanced access to training facilities, coordinated maritime domain awareness, and continued joint exercises under the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement. Economically, discussions centered on advancing the Green and Digital Economy Agreement, facilitating the movement of professionals and data, and developing regional standards for carbon trading. The leaders also underscored the importance of maintaining open, rules-based trade architecture within ASEAN and the Indo-Pacific. Wong's visit — his first since assuming office — symbolically underscored Singapore's commitment to continuity in bilateral cooperation, while marking a new phase of high-level engagement focused on sustainability, connectivity, and regional security integration.

Beijing and Seoul Reaffirm Diplomatic Reset in Foreign Ministers' Exchange

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his South Korean counterpart, Cho Hyun, held a telephone conversation on October 7 in which both sides expressed a strong willingness to deepen bilateral ties, strengthen mutual trust, and “avoid disruptions” in the relationship. Wang emphasized the importance China attaches to its partnership with South Korea, pointing specifically to the upcoming APEC Economic Leaders' Meetings as platforms for reinforcing consensus, multilateralism, and regional integration. Cho, in turn, affirmed South Korea's commitment to elevating exchanges and leveraging high-level visits as opportunities for advancing cooperation.

Although the call was not tied to a particular negotiation or agreement, the timing and tone suggest both capitals are seeking to stabilize and recalibrate ties amid shifting regional dynamics. China's insistence on avoiding “disruptions” implicitly signals concern over external interference or volatility, while Seoul's engagement indicates a desire to ensure diplomatic flexibility amid its balancing acts with both the U.S. and China. Observers will be watching whether this verbal reset gives rise to concrete deliverables—such as trade facilitation, people-to-people exchanges, or coordinated regional diplomacy—especially as both nations host back-to-back APEC summits.

India Elevates Diplomatic Engagement with Kabul Amid Taliban Visit to New Delhi

In a landmark move, India has announced the upgrade of its Technical Mission in Kabul to a full-fledged embassy, signaling a recalibration in its approach toward Afghanistan under Taliban rule. This decision was confirmed during the first official visit to India by Afghanistan's acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, whose six-day diplomatic trip underscores the Taliban's efforts to expand its international engagement beyond traditional partners. While New Delhi continues to withhold formal recognition of the Taliban regime, the reopening of the Indian embassy in Kabul represents strategic hedging — managing ties pragmatically in a volatile neighborhood.

During his visit, Muttaqi met with Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar and other senior officials, pressing for enhanced cooperation in trade, health, infrastructure, and consular services. Jaishankar reaffirmed India's interest in contributing to Afghanistan's development and stability, while also securing commitments from the Taliban to prevent misuse of Afghan territory against India. The two sides also jointly condemned regional terrorism and emphasized mutual respect for sovereignty, marking a notable shift in India's India–Afghanistan posture toward cautious reengagement in diplomacy and development.

Malaysia as ASEAN Chair Presses Myanmar Junta on Peace Commitments

Malaysia's Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan is undertaking a one-day mission to Naypyitaw on October 9 to engage directly with Myanmar's ruling junta — including Senior General Min Aung Hlaing — on the contentious issues of the upcoming December elections and the implementation of ASEAN's stalled five-point peace plan. The visit comes amid growing regional frustration that the junta has repeatedly failed to uphold its commitments: since 2022, military leaders have been barred from ASEAN's formal meetings for disregarding the bloc's roadmap for peace. With domestic violence surging again — including a latest military strike in Sagaing Region that killed at least 20 civilians — Malaysia is emphasizing that peace, security, and humanitarian access must take precedence over a flawed electoral timetable.

Hasan's mission is symbolically important: as ASEAN chair, Kuala Lumpur is under pressure to show proactive leadership and credibility in dealing with Myanmar's protracted crisis. During the trip, Malaysia will seek commitments on cessation of hostilities, expanded humanitarian corridors, and more inclusive dialogue among Myanmar's stakeholders. Observers note that the junta may try to use the meeting to extract legitimacy — for instance by accepting Malaysian election observers — but Malaysia has insisted that any election be preceded by peace and broad participation.

Beijing Tightens Grip Over Global Rare-Earth Supply Chain Ahead of Trump-Xi Summit

On October 9, China announced a sweeping expansion of its export control regime over rare earth elements, adding five new elements (holmium, erbium, thulium, europium, and ytterbium) to its restricted list and imposing licensing requirements on dozens of related processing technologies and equipment. The new rules explicitly bar licenses for overseas defense users, while advanced semiconductor and AI applications will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. China also extended the regime extraterritorially: foreign manufacturers using Chinese rare earth materials or equipment must now seek Chinese approval to export products even if those goods are assembled abroad.

Analysts view China's moves as a preemptive bid to enhance negotiating strength ahead of the anticipated Trump–Xi meeting, turning rare earths into a potent strategic card. The tighter export controls have already spurred gains in rare earth miner stocks globally. However, by signaling that even downstream components and magnets may require approvals, Beijing risks ratcheting up global efforts to diversify supply chains away from China. As scholars note, deeper structural dependence on China in midstream processing already heightens trade vulnerability for many nations. Meanwhile, Washington has responded with proposed counter-measures, including new tariffs and export controls, potentially opening a renewed front in U.S.–China trade tensions.

U.S. Imposes Export Restrictions on Chinese Firms Linked to Drone Supply Chains

On October 8, the U.S. Department of Commerce added 15 Chinese companies to its Entity List after determining they had facilitated the procurement of U.S.-origin electronic components used in weaponized unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) deployed by Iranian proxies, including Hamas and the Houthi movement. Of those, 10 firms were identified for supporting the use of components in drones operated by the Houthis in Yemen, while five more were flagged over involvement in parts recovered from Hamas UAVs. Under this designation, exports and transfers to these entities require specific licenses, which are likely to be denied, significantly constraining their ability to access U.S. technology.

The move reflects Washington's intensifying focus on disrupting cross-border networks that link high-tech supply chains with militant groups across the Middle East. By targeting intermediate component suppliers rather than end-user jurisdictions alone, the U.S. is seeking deeper leverage over global technology flows. Observers say this step also serves a symbolic purpose: it underscores the United States' readiness to hold firms in third-party states accountable if they materially support conflict zones, particularly when U.S. technologies are involved. Moreover, it adds pressure on China's export and oversight regimes, compelling Beijing to respond to international scrutiny over the end-use of its dual-use technologies.

Massive Quake Rattles Mindanao; Tsunami Alerts Triggered

A powerful magnitude 7.5 earthquake struck offshore in the southern Philippines on October 10, with its epicenter located off Manay town in Davao Oriental. Initial readings had pegged it at 7.6 before being adjusted to 7.5, at a depth of approximately 20 km. The quake triggered tsunami warnings for coastal regions across the Philippines and parts of Indonesia, with authorities cautioning that wave heights of over one meter above normal tides were possible within 300 km of the epicenter.

Regional authorities have confirmed at least two fatalities in Mati City, Davao Oriental province, resulting from the tremor. Local media also report structural damage in nearby towns, panic among residents, and evacuations in coastal communities. The quake comes just days after a deadly magnitude 6.9 earthquake in Cebu that claimed more than 60 lives, underscoring the Philippines' acute vulnerability as part of the Pacific "Ring of Fire." Authorities remain on alert for strong aftershocks and are coordinating search, rescue, and relief operations in affected areas.

U.S. Proposes Barring Chinese Airlines from Overflying Russia on U.S. Routes

On October 9, the Trump administration announced a proposed rule that would prohibit Chinese passenger airlines from using Russian airspace on flights to and from the United States, citing a competitive imbalance that disadvantages U.S. carriers. The U.S. Department of Transportation argued that Chinese airlines currently benefit from shorter, fuel-saving routes above Russia — a privilege unavailable to U.S. carriers, which have been barred from Russian skies since 2022 following mutual aviation sanctions after the Ukraine war. The proposal requires affected Chinese airlines to respond within two days, with the rule potentially going into effect as early as November.

The move escalates tension in U.S.–China aviation relations, positioning overflight rights as a new battleground in the broader geopolitical and economic contest. U.S. airlines and labor groups welcomed the proposal, framing it as a necessary step to "level the playing field," while Beijing warned that such a restriction would disrupt international travel and people-to-people exchanges. Observers see this as part of a broader U.S. strategy to assert leverage in high-stakes sectors (like aviation and technology) ahead of anticipated talks between Trump and Xi, and as pressure on China to recalibrate its aviation policies amid intensifying trade frictions.

“T-Dome” Unveiled: Taiwan’s New Multi-Layer Air Defence System

In his October 10 National Day address, President Lai Ching-te formally unveiled plans for a new multi-layered air defence network dubbed “T-Dome” (Taiwan Dome), designed to bolster the island’s interception capabilities against drones, missiles, rockets, and aircraft. He pledged to accelerate construction of the system, emphasizing that it would integrate high-level detection, layered defense layers, and more rigorous interception mechanisms. Lai also reiterated his administration’s commitment to lifting defense expenditure — with a target of over 3 percent of GDP next year and ultimately to 5 percent by 2030 — framing the T-Dome system as central to a “peace through strength” posture.

Signal to Beijing and Allies: Defensive Modernization Meets Strategic Messaging

The announcement comes amid intensifying Chinese military pressure around Taiwan, including hybrid warfare tactics and frequent air-sea patrols. By deploying the language of a “defensive dome,” Taipei seeks to position itself not as a bellicose actor but as one strengthening deterrence through protective, layered capabilities. The reference to systems like Israel’s Iron Dome is not accidental — it signals to domestic and international audiences Taiwan’s ambition to field advanced missile defense architecture. At the same time, the move is calibrated to reassure the United States and other partners of Taipei’s resolve and seriousness in military modernization, while challenging Beijing’s narrative that Taipei’s capabilities inherently threaten China.

Kim Uses Anniversary Spectacle to Project Rising Global Status

At the 80th anniversary celebrations of North Korea’s ruling Workers’ Party held on October 9, leader Kim Jong Un declared that the country’s international standing is growing stronger daily, delivering his remarks in front of foreign dignitaries at Pyongyang’s May Day Stadium. He lauded the party’s unbroken legacy, stating it had “not a single mistake or error” over eight decades, and framed North Korea as a sovereign power undeterred by external constraints. The event featured mass games, performances, and an audience response “that shook the capital’s night sky,” underlining the regime’s continuing mastery of theatrical symbolism.

Kim’s speech also carried diplomatic weight: the anniversary was attended by high-level foreign figures such as Chinese Premier Li Qiang, Vietnamese Party Chief To Lam, and Russian Security Council Deputy Chairman Dmitry Medvedev — each signaling a willingness to engage despite international pressure on Pyongyang. Kim met individually with Li and To Lam, promising a “new chapter” in strategic dialogue and cooperation, especially in light of their recent joint appearances under the aegis of Russia–China–North Korea alignment. The absence of a publicly noted full military parade during the celebration suggests a calibrated balance between projecting strength and managing optics under global scrutiny.

Modi Reports “Good Progress” in U.S.–India Trade Talks After Trump Call

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi confirmed that in a recent phone conversation with U.S. President Donald Trump, the two leaders “reviewed good progress achieved in trade negotiations” and agreed to maintain close communication in the coming weeks. The call follows a flurry of trade discussions in Washington, where Indian and U.S. negotiators sought to bridge gaps amid tensions over tariffs and market access.

While India faces punitive U.S. tariffs—50 percent on many goods, impacting labor-intensive exports—Modi’s remarks point to a cautious optimism that substantive breakthroughs may yet emerge. The tone suggests that New Delhi is seeking to signal both diplomatic goodwill and negotiation momentum ahead of the next round of meetings, even as underlying structural differences remain difficult to resolve.

Li’s Pyongyang Visit Deepens China–DPRK Strategic Dialogue

Chinese Premier Li Qiang visited Pyongyang from October 9–11 to attend North Korea’s 80th Workers’ Party anniversary events, marking the highest-level Chinese trip to the DPRK since 2019. During a meeting with Kim Jong Un, the two leaders discussed broadening cooperation through expanded high-level exchanges, deepened strategic communication, and more comprehensive multidimensional ties. Li underscored that strengthening China–DPRK relations is a “consistent and steadfast strategic policy,” pledging to uphold and develop the traditional friendship.

The visit is not merely ceremonial: it signals Beijing’s intent to reassert influence over Pyongyang even as North Korea pursues strategic hedging with Russia. Observers interpret the emphasis on “strategic communication” and high-level engagement as Beijing’s attempt to anchor Pyongyang more firmly in its orbit ahead of greater unpredictability on the Korean Peninsula. Moreover, by aligning the visit with the anniversary celebrations (which drew foreign delegations from Vietnam and Russia), China positions itself as an essential interlocutor in any emerging trilateral dynamics involving North Korea, Russia, and itself.

Trade Turbulence Before the Summit: Trump Slaps China with 100 % Tariffs Ahead of Xi Meeting

On October 10, President Donald Trump announced he would impose a 100 percent tariff on all Chinese imports, asserting this as a response to Beijing’s newly tightened export controls on rare earths and critical minerals. Trump also flagged imminent export controls on U.S. high-tech software, and questioned the rationale for his planned meeting with President Xi Jinping in South Korea, saying “there seems to be no reason to do so.” While he later clarified that the meeting was not yet cancelled, his rhetoric cast serious doubt on its viability.

The tariff announcement and export threat came at a delicate moment — Beijing’s recent rare earth controls had already triggered alarms across global tech and defense

sectors, and the U.S.–China trade “truce” appeared to be evaporating. Market reaction was swift: equities tumbled, and analysts warned that a more entrenched trade conflict could undermine broader diplomatic initiatives, including any prospective Trump-Xi summit. The move underscores how deeply interwoven economics and geopolitics have become in U.S.–China relations — with overflight rights, technology bans, and high-stakes supply chains now closely tied to high-level diplomacy.

Royal Navy’s High-Profile India Visit Launches First Dual-Carrier Exercise

The Royal Navy on October 8 began a high-visibility visit to India, centered on a coordinated deployment with India’s carrier strike group. The flagship HMS Prince of Wales linked up with India’s INS Vikrant as part of Exercise Konkan-25, the first time both nations have conducted full carrier strike group operations side by side. The visit includes port calls in Mumbai and Goa, underlining the diplomatic as well as operational dimension of the deployment.

Beyond the naval showcase, the visit conveys London’s ambition to entrench its role in the Indo-Pacific security architecture through tangible cooperation. The dual-carrier operations validate increased interoperability, command-and-control integration, and joint air, surface, and undersea coordination between the two navies. Timing of the deployment also dovetails with broader diplomatic engagement: the visit complements British Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s trip to India and corresponds to expanded defense commerce and strategic alignment between the two states. This naval diplomacy reinforces India’s status as a key partner for the U.K. in sustaining a rules-based maritime order in an evolving Indo-Pacific environment.

Vietnam and North Korea Ink Multi-Sector Cooperation Pacts

During Vietnam Communist Party chief Tô Lâm’s landmark visit to Pyongyang, Hanoi and Pyongyang signed cooperation agreements covering the defence, foreign affairs, and health ministries, as reported by North Korean state media KCNA on October 11. This is the first trip to North Korea by a high-level Vietnamese leader in nearly two decades — a notable diplomatic opening which coincided with North Korea’s 80th anniversary celebrations.

Though the deals’ precise terms remain undisclosed, the defense component stands out as a signal that Vietnam is exploring deeper strategic engagement, potentially in training, military diplomacy, or arms cooperation. The move may reflect Hanoi balancing its longstanding ties with Beijing while hedging amid shifting regional pressures. Observers will now watch whether these pacts lead to tangible joint programs or whether they remain largely symbolic.

Medvedev Meets Kim, Reaffirms Moscow's Commitments to DPRK Alliance

Former Russian President and current Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council, Dmitry Medvedev, visited Pyongyang and held talks with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, delivering personal greetings from President Vladimir Putin and expressing gratitude for Pyongyang's support of Russia's military efforts in Ukraine. During the meeting, Medvedev pledged that Russia would honor its obligations under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty signed in 2024 — a pact that enshrines defense and military cooperation as central to their bilateral architecture.

The visit reinforces the increasingly convergent strategic interests of Moscow and Pyongyang amid global pressures. By linking North Korean support in Ukraine to a reaffirmation of bilateral ties, Russia is signaling it views the DPRK not merely as a regional partner but as a committed security actor in its wider geopolitical posture. Observers interpret the trip as a demonstration of Russia's willingness to double down on its alliance with North Korea even under sanction regimes — and as a message to other regional actors about the resilience of this Russia–DPRK axis.

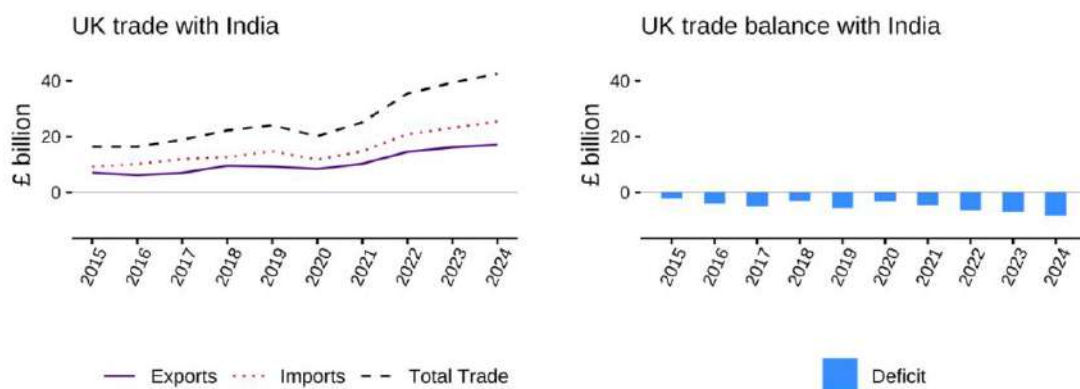
2. STATISTICS OF THE WEEK

UK–India Trade Reaches Record £42.6 Billion in 2024

According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), total trade between the United Kingdom and India surged to a record £42.6 billion in 2024, marking a sustained upward trajectory since 2021. UK exports to India rose from £16.2 billion in 2023 to £17.1 billion in 2024, while imports grew more sharply—from £23.2 billion to £25.5 billion over the same period. The data underscore the strengthening commercial links between the two economies, driven by increasing flows in goods, services, and investment cooperation amid ongoing bilateral trade negotiations.

Despite this robust expansion, the UK’s trade deficit with India widened to £8.4 billion in 2024, up from £7.0 billion the previous year, reflecting a faster rise in imports relative to exports. Total trade volumes have nearly tripled since 2015, highlighting India’s growing significance as a UK trading partner. With the UK–India free trade agreement under active discussion, the latest figures point to both the potential and the structural imbalances that future negotiations will aim to address.

The charts below present a time series for trade between the UK and India for each year between 2015 and 2024:



Source: ONS, UK trade in goods and services, Q1 2025

The data that are presented in the charts above are given in the table below in £ billion:

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Value of total trade	16.4	16.4	18.9	22.3	24.1	20.2	25.2	35.5	39.4	42.6
Value of exports	7.1	6.2	7.0	9.6	9.3	8.4	10.3	14.6	16.2	17.1
Value of imports	9.3	10.2	12.0	12.7	14.8	11.8	14.8	20.9	23.2	25.5
Trade balance	-2.2	-4.0	-5.0	-3.1	-5.6	-3.3	-4.5	-6.3	-7.0	-8.4

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68c99c9ade855c02ab517bba/india-trade-and-investment-factsheet-2025-09-19.pdf>

3. MAP OF THE WEEK

China Dominates Global Rare Earth Reserves

The latest data from the U.S. Geological Survey highlights China's commanding position in global rare earth element (REE) reserves, estimated at 44 million metric tons—nearly half of the world's total supply. As shown in the map, the world's largest reserves are concentrated across a handful of countries, with Brazil, Vietnam, Russia, and the United States also possessing notable deposits ranging between 10 million and 20 million tons each. China's dominance reflects decades of state-driven investment in resource exploration and processing infrastructure, securing its leverage in the global supply of critical minerals essential for electric vehicles, renewable energy technologies, and advanced electronics.

This concentration of reserves has far-reaching geopolitical implications, particularly amid U.S.–China trade tensions and Beijing's recent decision to tighten export controls on key rare earth materials and technologies. The data underscores why China's control over extraction, refining, and export channels remains a strategic advantage — and a vulnerability for industrialized economies dependent on these inputs. As countries such as the U.S., Australia, and India race to diversify their supply chains and develop domestic capabilities, rare earth security is poised to remain at the forefront of global economic and strategic policy debates.

Reserves of rare earth elements

China has the largest reserves of rare earth elements in the world – 44 million metric tons, or about half of the estimated global reserves.

Reserves of rare earth elements
in metric tons



Note: Data through January 2025

By Jackie Gu • Source: United States Geological Survey

<https://www.reuters.com/business/autos-transportation/some-european-auto-supplier-plants-shut-down-after-chinas-rare-earth-curbs-2025-06-04/>

4. PHOTO OF THE WEEK

UK and India Conduct First-Ever Dual Carrier Operations

This week's image captures a historic moment in maritime cooperation — the Royal Navy's HMS Prince of Wales sailing alongside the Indian Navy's INS Vikrant during Exercise Konkan-25 in the Arabian Sea. The exercise marks the first time the two navies have conducted dual carrier strike group operations, showcasing a new level of interoperability and trust between London and New Delhi. The joint formation also included multiple destroyers, frigates, and support vessels from both nations, underscoring their shared commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Beyond its symbolic value, the deployment reflects the deepening UK–India defense partnership, coinciding with a broader alignment on maritime security, technology collaboration, and regional stability. The exercise demonstrates both nations' growing blue-water capabilities and their readiness to coordinate large-scale operations in critical sea lanes. It stands as a visual testament to the strengthening strategic ties between two of the world's leading democracies at a time of shifting geopolitical dynamics across the Indian Ocean region.



<https://news.usni.org/2025/10/07/u-k-indian-navy-carrier-strike-groups-conduct-first-ever-dual-carrier-operations>

5. INFOGRAPHIC OF THE WEEK

China and North Korea Reaffirm Strategic Unity

This week's infographic captures the high-level meeting between Chinese Premier Li Qiang and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Pyongyang on October 9, 2025, underscoring Beijing and Pyongyang's intent to deepen their comprehensive strategic cooperation. Li emphasized China's long-term commitment to North Korea as a "trusted partner," aligning with President Xi Jinping's directive to strengthen bilateral synergy across political, economic, and multilateral fronts. The visit, which coincided with the 80th anniversary of North Korea's ruling Workers' Party, highlighted China's continued diplomatic engagement with its socialist neighbor amid heightened regional volatility.

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**Li Qiang Meets Kim Jong Un:
Strengthening China-DPRK
Strategic Ties**

October 9, 2025 | Pyongyang, DPRK

“ We will work together to promote new progress in bilateral ties. **”**

Li Qiang emphasized China's strategic view of North Korea as a long-term partner – echoing Xi Jinping's directive for deeper bilateral synergy in politics, economy, and multilateral forums.

“ Consolidating and developing friendly ties with China remains the unwavering stance of the DPRK, regardless of changes in the international situation. **”**

Kim Jong Un underscored North Korea's loyalty to Beijing – framing the partnership as vital for regional peace, socialist solidarity, and resistance to Western influence.

The meeting marks a reassertion of Sino-North Korean unity – not just in words but in shared vision, signaling deeper coordination in the shifting balance of global power.

eh4s.eu

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/eurohub4sino_li-qiang-meets-kim-jong-un-strengthening-activity-7382273769760776194-_wdQ?utm_source=share&utm

6. REGIONAL ALLIANCES

Vietnam's Quiet Reinforcement of DPRK Ties

On October 9, 2025, Vietnam's Communist Party chief Tô Lâm traveled to Pyongyang for the first visit by a Vietnamese leader in nearly two decades, attending the 80th anniversary celebrations of North Korea's ruling Workers' Party. During the visit, Hanoi and Pyongyang signed cooperation agreements across defense, foreign affairs, and health ministries — signaling a revival of institutional linkages despite minimal prior contact. The inclusion of Vietnam's defence minister in the delegation underscores the importance Hanoi attaches to signaling military-affiliated engagement.

Strategic Signals and Constraints

The renewed ties between Hanoi and Pyongyang carry layered strategic cues. For Vietnam, the rapprochement reflects a pragmatic hedging posture: advancing diplomacy with a historically ideological partner to maintain autonomy in foreign policy, especially amid tensions among China, the U.S., and regional powers. Analysts see Vietnam's outreach as a message that it will not cede influence in socialist network spaces solely to China, while preserving its maneuverability. For North Korea, Vietnam offers a prestige partner in Southeast Asia — reaffirming Pyongyang's efforts to break out of isolation and legitimize its international standing beyond Northeast Asia.

Yet, significant constraints temper this emerging alliance. Bilateral trade remains negligible — roughly under US\$20 million annually — and Hanoi has maintained compliance with multilateral sanctions regimes. In defense cooperation, formal technology or arms exchanges remain unadvertised, likely constrained by UN and U.S. sanctions on the DPRK. Moreover, Vietnam must navigate the sensitivities of its major economic partners — South Korea, Japan, and the United States — showing that its friendliness toward Pyongyang does not jeopardize core relationships or strategic alignments.

Implications for Regional Dynamics

Vietnam's recalibrated relationship with North Korea may offer it a subtle diplomatic role as a bridge, especially in any future dialogues involving the Korean peninsula. Its nonaligned posture may allow it to function as a trusted interlocutor when other channels are blocked by ideological or geopolitical friction. At the same time, Hanoi's renewed engagement underscores the persistence of ideological influence and party-to-party diplomacy in Asia's regional order — a reminder that diplomatic influence in East Asia still operates along lines beyond pure national security calculus.

As Vietnam and North Korea step into deeper cooperation — even if initially symbolic — observers will watch whether this sparks tangible programs in defense, development, or cultural exchange, and whether it triggers recalibrations among regional actors. For now, the resumption of alliance ties reflects Vietnam's diplomatic agility in a contested regional environment.

7. ANALYSIS

The UK–India Strategic Pivot

In 2025, the United Kingdom and India are actively repositioning their relationship from a historically rooted partnership toward a forward-looking strategic alliance. This shift is anchored in a recently signed free trade deal, burgeoning defense cooperation, and a shared vision of navigating a multipolar Indo-Pacific. Against the backdrop of shifting global alignments, London and New Delhi are seizing the moment to upgrade their engagement architecture — not only to boost economic ties but to build a resilient basis for collective influence across Asia.

Economic Integration as the Foundation

A critical turning point came in July 2025, when the UK and India signed the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), lowering tariffs on goods ranging from Scotch whisky and textiles to automobiles and spices. This deal is projected to increase bilateral trade by £25.5 billion by 2040 and is widely characterized by British and Indian officials as the most significant trade agreement the UK has made since Brexit.

During Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s October 2025 visit to India, the UK also secured £1.3 billion in commitments from 64 Indian firms to invest in Britain, covering sectors such as digital, clean technologies, and advanced manufacturing. Starmer further emphasized his ambition to see the trade deal implemented “as quickly as humanly possible,” reflecting the urgency London attaches to translating agreement into tangible market access.

Defense, Technology & Supply Chain Ties

Beyond trade, defense collaboration is becoming a visible strand of the relationship. London inked a £350 million contract to supply India with lightweight multirole missiles manufactured in Northern Ireland, a move that underscores the mutual push toward deepening military-industrial linkages. Complementing this arms sales deal, both sides agreed on a partnership to co-develop electric propulsion systems for naval vessels, aiming at higher-tech synergies in maritime capability.

Digital and supply-chain integration are also ascending in priority. The Starmer-Modi meeting spotlighted joint initiatives in connectivity, AI, and innovation centers intended to fuse British research and Indian scale. These efforts align with both countries’ ambitions to reduce reliance on third-party supply hubs in increasingly contested sectors like semiconductors, energy transition materials, and cybersecurity.

Managing Political Sensitivities & Mobility

Despite these advances, the UK has drawn a clear line on migration. As Starmer prepared for his India visit, he declared that visa liberalization is not on the agenda, a stance intended to uphold his party’s commitments on immigration control. Starmer pointed out that previous trade negotiations had faltered over visa demands, but under the current agreement, mobility issues were explicitly excluded.

At the same time, both governments are seeking alternative forms of people-to-people engagement. The UK and India have discussed schemes for young professionals exchange paths, allowing for restricted stays that sidestep full immigration liberalization. This calibrated compromise reflects the tension between London's domestic political constraints and India's expectation of freer movement for its skilled diaspora.

Conclusion

In sum, the UK–India relationship is undergoing a strategic reinvigoration. What began as a commercial agreement is evolving into a broader alliance with defense, technology, and political dimensions. Though not free of friction — especially on migration and geopolitical alignments — both capitals appear committed to building a durable platform for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific era. Their success will depend on speed of implementation, mutual trust, and the resilience of this budding alliance amid surging regional contests.