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India, Philippines Upgrade Strategic Partnership to Boost Trade and Defense

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India and the Philippines have elevated their relationship to a strategic partnership aimed at deepening cooperation in trade, defense, and maritime security. The announcement came Tuesday following bilateral talks in New Delhi between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and visiting Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

The new agreement reflects both countries' shared interest in fostering stability and economic growth in the Indo-Pacific region. It also signals a commitment to closer collaboration in areas beyond defense, including space exploration, tourism, culture, and digital technologies.

India's Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal confirmed that the upgraded partnership will open new avenues for cooperation across multiple sectors. "The scope of this partnership is broad, encompassing security, economic development, and technological innovation," Jaiswal said.

Following their talks, Prime Minister Modi emphasized the importance of a rules-based international order, stating, "India and the Philippines are committed to peace, security, prosperity, and a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region." He noted that the expanded cooperation will strengthen not only bilateral ties but also contribute to regional stability.

President Marcos echoed this sentiment, describing the agreement as having significance beyond the immediate relationship between the two nations. "This strategic partnership will doubtless resonate beyond the confines of our bilateral relationship," he said. Marcos also reaffirmed the Philippines' intention to work alongside India to maintain a "free and open Indo-Pacific."

The upgrade to a strategic partnership builds on recent defense interactions between the two countries. In 2023, the Philippines received its first batch of BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles from India, part of a \$375 million defense deal aimed at boosting Manila's maritime deterrence capabilities. The latest agreement is expected to pave the way for more joint military exercises, technology sharing, and coordinated maritime patrols.

Trade between India and the Philippines has been growing steadily, with both sides identifying potential for further expansion in sectors such as pharmaceuticals, information technology, renewable energy, and infrastructure. Analysts believe the strategic partnership could help diversify supply chains and create new business opportunities, particularly in emerging markets across Southeast Asia and South Asia.

The two leaders also discussed regional security challenges, including disputes in the South China Sea. While no specific actions were disclosed, both countries reaffirmed their commitment to international law and peaceful dispute resolution. The emphasis on

maritime cooperation aligns with the Philippines' efforts to safeguard its territorial waters and India's broader Indo-Pacific strategy.

In addition to economic and defense-related initiatives, cultural exchange and people-to-people ties are set to receive a boost. Programs to promote tourism, academic collaboration, and cultural heritage exchanges are expected to feature prominently in the partnership's next phase.

The India-Philippines strategic partnership underscores the growing importance of cross-regional cooperation in addressing 21st-century challenges. By combining economic ambitions with defense preparedness and diplomatic engagement, both nations aim to shape a more secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific.