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Month which will see move from G-20 to G-2 and the Race for Influence: Who's Winning the Indo-Pacific?

The first week of November delivered a masterclass in strategic positioning. While the world watched Donald Trump skip APEC's champagne receptions in South Korea to host trick-or-treaters at the White House, Xi Jinping seized centre stage in Gyeongju, rebranding China as the defender of free trade. It was theatre, certainly—but theatre with consequences. Not to miss, G-2 becoming the new buzzword!

Meanwhile, away from the summit spotlight, India signed a \$455 million railway deal with Bhutan. Modest headlines, outsized implications. Two rail lines totalling 89 kilometres will connect the landlocked kingdom to Indian networks for the first time, paid entirely by New Delhi. Call it infrastructure diplomacy or call it strategic insurance—either way, it is a tangible counter to Beijing's creeping influence across South Asia.

On the sidelines of the 12th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus, India and the United States inked a ten-year defence framework, the "Framework for the U.S.-India Major Defence Partnership". Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth put pen to paper despite simmering trade tensions, with Washington still slapping 50 percent tariffs on Indian goods. The message? Strategic partnerships transcend transactional squabbles.

For Washington, India is no longer just a partner, it is a pillar of Indo-Pacific stability.

Across the globe, Trump signed minerals agreements with Australia, Japan, Malaysia, and Thailand, aimed squarely at reducing American dependence on Chinese rare earths. Sensible? Absolutely. Coherent? Debatable. The man who dismissed APEC as beneath his attention simultaneously doubled down on Indo-Pacific partnerships, proving once again that Trump's foreign policy defies easy categorisation. His absence from South Korea handed Xi a propaganda win, but his minerals deals and AUKUS endorsement sent a clear signal: American commitment to the region remains, even if the messenger is inconsistent.

Back at APEC, Xi did not waste the opening. He proposed a global body to govern artificial intelligence, positioning China as the voice of reason against unilateral American tech dominance. It was classic Beijing playbook present multilateralism as an antidote to Washington's exceptionalism, appeal to middle powers tired of being squeezed between superpowers.

The U.S. has long resisted international AI regulation, arguing that innovation cannot be shackled by bureaucracy. China's pitch? Let us write the rules together, before someone else writes them for us. Whether nations buy it remains to be seen, but Xi framed the debate on his terms.

Elsewhere, history arrived quietly in Tokyo. Sanae Takaichi became Japan's first woman prime minister, inheriting a nation wrestling with stubborn inflation, simmering regional tensions, and domestic political fatigue.

Then there was Union Home Minister Amit Shah, unveiling India's maritime vision stretching to 2047—a blueprint for naval expansion, port modernisation, and oceanic power from the Arabian Sea to the Bay of Bengal and beyond.

The question is not whether partnerships matter—they clearly do. The question is whether they can be sustained when economic interests clash, when domestic politics intrude, and when the costs of commitment outweigh the benefits of cooperation. Trump skipped APEC but kept AUKUS. Xi championed free trade while tightening export controls. India signed a defence deal with Washington while enduring its tariffs. Welcome to the Indo-Pacific in 2025: contradictions are not bugs, they are features.

Purushendra Singh
Editor

P.S.: As G20 leaders prepare to gather in South Africa this November, the question looms larger than ever: Can Pretoria prove that multilateralism matters more than ever, or will the summit simply show that twenty voices count for less than two (G-2)?

Message for our Readers

This is the 97th edition of the fortnightly news wrap from the Centre, which carries select published news or comments on a relevant issue. There are equally important issues that may have been overlooked to keep the news wrap short and swiftly readable.

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APEC leaders wrap up summit after Trump and Xi reach truce in trade war

At the APEC summit, U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed to a truce in their ongoing trade war, signalling a potential thaw in tensions. The leaders pledged renewed cooperation, easing global concerns and setting a more optimistic tone for future economic relations.



- [Japan's Sojitz launches Australian rare-earth imports to reduce China risk](#) | Nikkei Asia
 - [Malaysia trade deal fuels concerns of sovereignty, new US levies](#) | The Business Times
 - [Vietnam, Singapore sign MoC on rice trade](#) | Vietnam +
 - [Saudi Arabia stakes \\$1tr on AI ambitions](#) | Dawn
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Strategic Issues

Pentagon chief urges closer ties with Vietnam amid prolonged arms supply talks

U.S. Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin urged stronger defence ties with Vietnam amid extended arms supply negotiations. The talks aim to deepen strategic cooperation and counter regional tensions, especially in the South China Sea. Despite historical animosities, both nations are exploring military collaboration, including potential U.S. equipment transfers to Vietnam.



- [Bangladesh's Continued "Pakistanization" Poses A Growing Threat to India](#) | Andrew Korybko's Newsletter
- [South Korea's Lee hopes to keep cooperating with Indonesia in military security](#) | Arab News
- [Pakistan and Afghanistan agree to extend ceasefire](#) | DW

- [US Backs Philippine Ally After Latest Maritime Clash with China](#) | The Diplomat
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No high-level US representatives will go to UN climate talks, Trump officials say

The U.S. will not send any high-level officials to the upcoming COP30 climate summit in Brazil, a White House official told Reuters, alleviating some concern among world leaders that Washington would send a team to scupper the talks.



- [India faces GDP loss of up to 24.7% by 2070 due to climate change: EU official](#) | The Hindu
 - [Thailand delays regional power project due to lack of tariff approval](#) | Energy News
 - [Brazil Unveils Initiative to Strengthen Urban Adaptation to Climate Change at COP30](#) | COP 30 Brasil
 - [Zambia's Largest Bank to Issue Nation's First Sustainability Bond](#) | Empire Magazine Africa
-



ASEAN summit concludes: What the group means for India

47th ASEAN Summit 2025 Malaysia: What is ASEAN, and why is it relevant for India? Where do its members stand on the US-China trade dispute? Ashok Sajjanhar, who has served as India's ambassador to several countries and negotiated for the India-EU and India-ASEAN trade deals



- [Can South Korea Manage the Competing Needs of the U.S. and China?](#) | The New York Times
- [‘Silver lining’ amid dark clouds, as Asean recognises need to deepen unity, says PM Wong](#) | The Strait Times
- [Taiwan's new opposition leader takes over, warning against risk of China war](#) | The Japan Times
- [With 11 Members Voting in Favour, 3 Abstaining, Security Council Adopts Resolution 2797 \(2025\), Renewing Mandate of UN Mission in Western Sahara for One Year](#) | United Nations
- [US Vice President Vance plans Kenya visit, source says](#) | The Indian Express



Ford to invest Rs 3,250 crore in India, defying Trump's local push

Ford is investing \$370 million (₹3,250 crore) to revive its Maraimalai Nagar plant in Tamil Nadu, India, for high-end engine exports. This move defies President Trump's push for domestic manufacturing and reflects Ford's renewed confidence in India despite past losses and geopolitical tensions



- [Economics is Europe's Tool for Everything](#) | FP
- [Japan PM pushed back against U.S. request to ban Russian energy imports, sources say](#) | The Asahi Shimbun
- [In a move to counter US tariffs, China and ASEAN sign upgraded free trade pact](#) | The Print

- [Ghana to conduct first major mining audit in a decade to recover lost revenue](#) | Ghana Web



China Sends Youngest Astronaut, Mice To ‘Heavenly Palace’ Station

China launched its youngest astronaut and a group of mice to the Tiangong (“Heavenly Palace”) space station, marking a milestone in its space program. The mission aims to study the biological effects of space travel and showcases China’s growing ambitions in space exploration and scientific research



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- [Russia’s Next Opposition Will Not Be Liberal](#) | FP