Melbourne just hosted a quiet revolution in the Indo-Pacific, and it deserved louder applause than it got. When Prime Ministers Anthony Albanese and Narendra Modi finalized an administrative arrangement to begin uranium exports and signed a sweeping new Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation, they didn't just add two documents to a long list of bilateral agreements. They closed a decade-long gap between what Canberra and New Delhi have said about each other and what they've actually done.

Consider how long this took. Australia and India signed a civil nuclear cooperation agreement back in 2014, under Tony Abbott and Modi, ending Canberra's historic reluctance to sell uranium to a country outside the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It entered into force in 2015. And then—nothing much happened. Technical questions about tracking Australian-origin material through India's fuel cycle kept commercial exports stalled for over a decade. This week's arrangement finally answers those questions, spelling out the accounting and verification procedures that satisfy Australian regulators while working for Indian utilities on the ground.

This matters because India is not asking for a favor; it's offering Australia a customer. New Delhi wants to reach roughly 100 gigawatts of nuclear capacity by 2047, up from about 8 gigawatts today, as it tries to keep growing without leaning further on coal. Australia sits on close to 28% of the world's known uranium reserves. That is about as clean a match between supplier and buyer as exists anywhere in the global economy, and it gives Australian miners a serious new market at a moment when climate politics are complicating the future of coal exports.

Skeptics will raise the old objection: since India isn't an NPT signatory, doesn't selling it uranium free up India's own domestic supply for military use? It's a fair question, and Australia has answered it the same way Washington did when it struck its own civil nuclear deal with India two decades ago. Every gram of Australian uranium is locked to India's declared civilian reactors under IAEA safeguards, with independent verification built into the new arrangement. India, for its part, has an unblemished non-proliferation record as a matter of practice, whatever its treaty status on paper. Canberra isn't taking a leap of faith here; it's applying a model that has already been tested and has held.

The defence declaration signed alongside it is, if anything, the more consequential document. It upgrades a relationship that has long punched below its weight given how much Canberra and New Delhi actually agree on. Since the two countries elevated ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2020, engagement has picked up—annual defence ministers' dialogues, more complex joint exercises, a first Australian defence trade mission to India last year. But this declaration goes further, explicitly naming defence cooperation a "cornerstone" of the relationship and committing both sides to expanded aircraft deployments from each other's territory, deeper personnel exchanges, and joint work on the technologies—sensors, autonomous systems, resilient networks—that will define military advantage in the decades ahead.

Then there's the water. The accompanying Maritime Security Collaboration Roadmap ties Australia's Maritime Border Command more closely to the Indian Coast Guard and plugs Canberra into India's Information Fusion Centre in Gurugram, the regional hub for tracking activity across the Indian Ocean. Neither country's officials need to say Beijing's name out loud for the intent to be obvious. Both governments have called, pointedly, for resolving disputes "without the threat or use of force or coercion" and for upholding freedom of navigation under the Law of the Sea. That is diplomatic language for a very concrete goal: keeping the sea lanes that carry Australian resources and Indian trade open to everyone, not subject to anyone's veto.

What makes this week genuinely significant, rather than just another round of joint statements, is how naturally the energy and security tracks reinforce each other. A reliable, geographically sensible uranium supplier reduces India's exposure to whatever happens with Kazakhstan or Canada. A more secure Indian Ocean protects the sea lanes that uranium, and everything else, travels through. Australia ends up playing two roles at once—energy supplier and security partner—and each makes the other more valuable.

None of this guarantees success. Export licensing in Australia needs to stay predictable, and India needs to actually build the reactor fleet fast enough to absorb the fuel, or the uranium deal risks becoming symbolic rather than commercial. On the defence side, memoranda of understanding on defence industry cooperation

need to turn into real co-production, not just more meetings. Both governments will also have to manage the inevitable domestic sniping—about nuclear exports in Australia, about foreign partnerships in India.

But the direction is right, and the timing is better. After more than a decade of an agreement that sat mostly on paper, Australia and India have shown they can turn strategic alignment into commercial and military reality. That’s a template worth watching—and, for Australians who’ve spent years hearing about the promise of the India relationship, a template worth celebrating.