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Why India-Vietnam is not China-Pakistan



Niranjan Chandrashekhar Oak

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The developments in South China Sea (SCS) affect India which is highlighted by emergence of 'Indo-Pacific' as a new geopolitical frame of reference although India is not a littoral state of Pacific Ocean and thus South China Sea. Indian Maritime Doctrine defines SCS as Secondary area of interest. But Indo-Pacific is geostrategically as well as geoeconomically significant for India.

According to some analysts India is responding to Chinese presence in Indian Ocean by going into China's backyard of the South China Sea as India is not really able to block China from appearing in the Indian Ocean which can be considered as an example of lateral pressure theory.¹

India is employing two-pronged strategy to counter China in South China Sea. First, India is building its own blue water navy with a capability to operate beyond Indian Ocean Region (IOR) in South China Sea. India's projection of maritime power into the South China Sea is underpinned by its build-up of the Andaman and Nicobar Command, which functions as a Far East

Naval Command looking down the Strait of Malacca into the South China Sea. The inauguration in July 2012 of the air marine station at INS Baaz, the most southerly point of the Andaman Islands, enables India to conduct surveillance operations into the South China Sea.²

Second, India is trying to forge bilateral as well as multilateral partnerships in the region. With Vietnam, India has robust relationship in the region. India-Philippines relationship is yet to achieve its full potential and it is slowly evolving. The two countries are focused on strengthening the bilateral ties and enhancing interoperability between their navies. Recently Indian Naval Ship (INS) Sahyadri, which was on operational deployment to South China Sea and North West Pacific region, entered Manila for extensive interactions with the Philippine Navy.³ The Philippines' Foreign Minister Albert F. Del Rosario, addressing the Second Nehru-Rizal Memorial Lecture on "Challenges and Opportunities: The Way Forward for India-Philippines Relations" in New Delhi, praised India for adhering to the international arbitration ruling on settling its maritime boundary with Bangladesh and also its land boundary with the neighbour.⁴ The comment

¹ David Scott, 'India's Incremental Balancing in the South China Sea', *E-International Relations*, July 26, 2015 at <http://www.e-ir.info/2015/07/26/indias-incremental-balancing-in-the-south-china-sea/> (Accessed November 24, 2015)

² Ibid

³ 'INS Sahyadri in Philippines', *The Hindu*, November 2, 2015 at <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-andhrapradesh/ins-sahyadri-in-philippines/article7832239.ece> (Accessed November 26, 2015)

⁴ 'Philippines praises India's stand on South China Sea', *daijiworld.com*, October 14, 2015 at http://www.daijiworld.com/news/news_disp.asp?n_id=362949 (Accessed November 24, 2015)

was seen to be directed against China. India-Australia maritime cooperation is also on the rise with the recently concluded AUSINDEX 15, first-ever joint maritime exercise.

On multilateral front, India is trying to balance Chinese threat with strategic alliances with US and Japan. In September 2015, the India-US-Japan trilateral dialogue was elevated from assistant secretary level to the foreign ministerial level. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry hosted the foreign ministers of Japan and India for the first ever trilateral ministerial meeting on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York. In addition to this, Japan became permanent participant of hitherto bilateral naval exercise between US and India – Malabar, 19th edition of which was concluded in Bay of Bengal in October 2015.

At the diplomatic level, of late, India has started raising the South China issue at various regional settings like the India-ASEAN Delhi Dialogue in 2014 and 2015, the ASEAN Regional Forum in 2014, and the East Asia Summit in 2013 and 2014. Addressing the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meet (ADMM) + in Malaysia in November 2015, Indian Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar said, "India hopes that all parties to the disputes in the South China Sea region will abide by the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, ensure its effective

implementation, and work together to ensure a peaceful resolution of disputes. We also hope that the Code of Conduct on the South China Sea would be concluded at an early date by consensus...the situation in the South China Sea and recent developments there have attracted concern. This is natural since freedom of navigation in international waters, the right of passage and overflight, unimpeded commerce and access to resources in accordance with recognised principles of international law including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, are of concern to all of us".⁵

Of the many strategies to counter China in South China Sea, perhaps the one doing rounds in the strategic community of New Delhi is that "Vietnam can be to India what Pakistan is to China. India can prioritise the military build-up of Vietnam (and the Philippines, and Indonesia) as the first tier of India's distant defence with a view to restricting Chinese options east of the Malacca Strait"⁶. If India eventually sheds its decades old attribute of strategic restraint, a potential Indo-Vietnam strategic cooperation could possibly shape up to counter China's partnership with Pakistan.⁷ However this proposition needs to be evaluated objectively.

India-Vietnam vis-a-vis China-Pakistan

Nuclear Status

It is important to remember that Pakistan is Nuclear Weapon State which is non signatory

⁵ 'India calls for early conclusion of S China Sea code of conduct', *The Indian Express*, November 5, 2015, at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/india-calls-for-early-conclusion-of-south-china-sea-code-of-conduct/> (Accessed December 1, 2015)

⁶ Bharat Karnad, 'Vietnam as India's Pivot', *Security Wise*, October 31, 2014, at <http://bharatkarnad.com/2014/10/31/vietnam-as-indias-pivot/> (Accessed November 24, 2015)

⁷ Aditi Malhotra, *Indo-Vietnam Relations: An Answer to Sino-Pak Partnership?*, Maritime Affairs, Vol 8 No 1, Summer 2012, pp 71-92, Routledge

to NPT. China has played a huge role in Pakistan's nuclear build up and is continuing its endeavour. In February 2015 Chinese official publicly confirmed that Beijing was involved in at least six nuclear power projects in Pakistan and was likely to export more to the country⁸ which has dubious record in terms of proliferation of nuclear weapons. Pakistan has developed tactical nuclear weapons which are directed towards India⁹, thus has lowered the nuclear threshold. Therefore India has legitimate reasons to believe that the increased civilian nuclear cooperation between Islamabad and Beijing would eventually bolster Islamabad's military program.

Bharat Karnad, Professor, National Security Studies, Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, had argued that the impracticable - a policy of imposing costs on Chinese behaviour of nuclear missile-arming Pakistan, by transferring easily nuclearisable missiles to Vietnam- has become Indian policy; the Modi government has decided to pass on the BrahMos missile to Hanoi.¹⁰ Although, in recent years, India has increased nuclear cooperation with Vietnam, it will be highly implausible to think that Vietnam has a

desire to possess nuclear weapons. There is no publicly available evidence to suggest that Hanoi sought nuclear weapons historically. Additionally, Vietnam is signatory to NPT as well as Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) Treaty which makes it unlikely to even think of acquiring nuclear weapons. India, too, has a clean track record in the matter of nuclear non-proliferation. So, even if India has to cope with nuclear neighbours on both eastern and western front, thanks to China, it won't be the case with the latter.

Military Assistance

Vietnam, dubbed India's "diamond on the South China Sea," has been the most noticeable of India's links with the littoral states.¹¹ Bilateral engagement has got a boost under Prime Minister Modi's government.

President Pranab Mukherjee visited Hanoi from September 14-17, 2014 ahead of Chinese Premier Xi Jinping's visit to India and Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung made an official visit to Delhi from October 27-28, 2014. The joint statement at the conclusion of President Mukherjee's state visit declared that cooperation in national defence was an important pillar in India-Vietnam strategic partnership.¹²

During PM Dung's visit, PM Modi went on to observe, "Our defence cooperation with Vietnam

⁸ Prashanth Parameswaran, 'China Confirms Pakistan Nuclear Projects', *The Diplomat*, February 10, 2015 at <http://thediplomat.com/2015/02/China-confirms-pakistan-nuclear-projects/> (Accessed December 1, 2015)

⁹ 'Pakistan Developed Tactical Nuclear Weapons to 'Deter' India, Says Top Official', *NDTV*, October 21, 2015, at <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/tactical-nuclear-weapons-to-deter-india-pakistan-1234795>

¹⁰ Bharat Karnad, Vietnam as India's Pivot, Security Wise, October 31, 2014, at <http://bharatkarnad.com/2014/10/31/vietnam-as-indias-pivot/> (Accessed November 24, 2015)

¹¹ David Scott (2013), 'India's Role in the South China Sea: Geopolitics and Geoeconomics in Play', *India Review*, 12:2, 51-69, Routledge, at <http://www.d-scott.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/india-scs.pdf> (Accessed November 25, 2015)

¹² Carl Thayer, 'India and Vietnam Advance Their Strategic Partnership', *The Diplomat*, December 11, 2014, at <http://thediplomat.com/2014/12/india-and-vietnam-advance-their-strategic-partnership/> (Accessed November 27, 2015)

is among our most important ones. India remains committed to the modernization of Vietnam's defence and security forces. This will include expansion of our training program, which is already very substantial, joint exercises and cooperation in defence equipment. We will quickly operationalize the 100 million dollars Line of Credit that will enable Vietnam to acquire new naval vessels from India". On the eve of Prime Minister Dung's visit, P. K. Chakravorty, adviser to BrahMos Aerospace, revealed that Russia had agreed to sell the BrahMos hypersonic cruise missile to Vietnam.¹³

In May 2015, Vietnamese Defence Minister Phùng Quang Thanh visited New Delhi to carry forward the bilateral India-Vietnam agenda that was established during Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung's October 2014 visit to India. Mr Thanh and his Indian counterpart signed a memorandum of understanding on defence cooperation and oversaw the signing of a memorandum on Coast Guard cooperation in New Delhi.¹⁴ Vietnam also explored the possibility of acquiring Indian-manufactured surveillance equipment such as unnamed aerial vehicles.

Since Vietnam uses Russian made defence platforms like Sukhoi Su-30 MK aircraft and Kilo-class submarine fleet, New Delhi is discussing the expansion of military training to include pilot training for the Sukhoi Su-30 MK aircraft. In October 2013, India commenced underwater combat training for Vietnamese navy personnel to operate Vietnam's new advanced Kilo-class submarine fleet. India will train up to 500 Vietnamese submariners in batches of 50 over a year-long program for each batch.¹⁵

On the other hand, Chinese assistance has exponentially accelerated the modernisation of Pakistan's army, navy and air force. From 1978 to 2008, China sold to Pakistan equipments roughly worth \$7 billion, which included short and medium range ballistic missiles, small arms and conventional weapon systems. In order to boost its maritime fighting capabilities, Pakistan had ordered four F-22P frigates, which were delivered in 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2013.¹⁶ In 2015, Pakistan signed a deal to acquire eight advanced conventional (non-nuclear) diesel-powered submarines from China. The contract could be worth \$4 billion to \$5 billion.¹⁷ In addition to this China and Pakistan have been involved in joint development of JF-17 thunder fighter aircraft.

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ankit Panda, 'India and Vietnam Push Ahead with Strategic Security Cooperation', *The Diplomat*, May 26, 2015, at <http://thediplomat.com/2015/05/india-and-vietnam-push-ahead-with-strategic-security-cooperation/> (Accessed November 26, 2015)

¹⁵ Carl Thayer, India and Vietnam Advance Their Strategic Partnership, *The Diplomat*, December 11, 2014, at <http://thediplomat.com/2014/12/india-and-vietnam-advance-their-strategic-partnership/> (Accessed November 27, 2015)

¹⁶ Aditi Malhotra, 'Indo-Vietnam Relations: An Answer to Sino-Pak Partnership?', *Maritime Affairs*, Vol 8 No 1, Summer 2012, pp 71-92, Routledge

¹⁷ 'Pakistan to buy 8 submarines from China in multibillion-dollar deal, report says', *The Times of India*, July 24, 2015 at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/Pakistan-to-buy-8-submarines-from-China-in-multibillion-dollar-deal-report-says/articleshow/48204766.cms> (Accessed November 30, 2015)

We can observe that while China has been supplying Pakistan with lethal weaponry, India is in infancy as far as supplying weaponry to Vietnam is concerned with some of the proposals still at ideational stage. Indian defence ties with Vietnam are basically in the form of providing training to Vietnamese defence personnel, giving line of credit, port calls by naval ships and joint naval exercises.

Party to Party Links

Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Vietnam on November 4, 2015 where he pledged to support the rule of Communist Party of Vietnam and vowed to support Vietnam on the socialist path of development. The Vietnamese are carefully balancing their ties. At one level they maintain healthy party-to-party ties with China and seek to boost trade and investment from China, on the other they want to build better ties with the US, Japan and India to off-set the Chinese who contest their claim to several South China Sea islands.¹⁸ Although much outside attention is focused on the disputes between the two countries in the South China Sea, the relationship is much broader and multifaceted than these disputes alone.¹⁹

This is not the case with India-Pakistan relations. The roots of enmity lies in the partition of British India, the two nation

theory and Pakistan's perpetual quest for parity with India among many other reasons. The parity doctrine also requires Pakistan to see India as an existential enemy.²⁰ In fact 'Indophobia' was one of the factors of Pakistan's nation building and it continues to be the one even today to a certain extent. That is why in spite of number of attempts to normalise relations between the two nations, we haven't seen resounding success so far.

Part of Larger Picture

President Hu Jintao back in 2003 had talked about Malacca Dilemma faced by China. Much water has flown under the bridge since then. Chinese have maintained constant presence in IOR for the stated goals of combating piracy off the coast of Somalia for a decade. In 2013, China announced China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which would pass through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir and work has already begun. CEPC would allow China to bypass Strait of Malacca.

Coincidentally, one could note sudden spike in Chinese submarine visits to ports in IOR over the last two years which were relatively uncommon occurrence until recently. In October 2014, a Song class submarine visited Colombo port, docking at a harbour controlled by a Chinese company. While the Sri Lankan authorities attempted to explain this oddity by citing operational exigencies, it was clear that China preferred its submarines in the IOR to dock in an exclusive facility. More so, India was

¹⁸ Manoj Joshi, 'India shows it is not serious about 'Act East' policy', *dailyo*, November 9, 2015, at <http://www.dailyo.in/politics/act-east-xi-jinping-south-China-sea-phonop-vietnam-communist-party-nine-dash-line-manohar-parrikar-asean/story/1/7258.html> (Accessed November 24, 2015)

¹⁹ Ramses Amer, 'Vietnam's Relations with China – A Multifaceted Partnership', Blog Post, The University of Nottingham, March 17, 2014, at <https://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/Chinapolicyinstitute/2014/03/17/vietnams-relations-with-China-a-multifaceted-partnership/> (Accessed November 24, 2015)

²⁰ Hussain Haqqani, 'Pakistan's elusive quest for parity', *The Hindu*, February 2, 2015, at <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/lead-article-pakistans-elusive-quest-for-parity/article6845576.ece> (Accessed December 2, 2015)

caught unaware about secret Chinese submarine docking at Karachi in May 2015.²¹

This, along with articulation by Chinese premier Xi of the idea of a "21st century maritime silk road" that connects the Pacific and Indian Oceans, or more specifically, China's coastline with Southeast Asia, the subcontinent, the Gulf and the east coast of Africa, shows that Pakistan is just a part of larger ambition of China to have dominance over Indian Ocean. With respect to Sino-India relations, Pakistan can be considered as a pivot to contain India.

India does not have any ambition to dominate SCS. India is only concerned about freedom of navigation in the SCS which is vital for India's geostrategic as well as geoeconomic interests. So in this respect as well, Sino-Pak bonhomie is not comparable with Indo-Vietnamese relations.

Conclusion

There is no better time than today to 'act' on our eastern seaboard to safeguard our vital interests and it is good sign that India has become more vocal on the matters related to SCS. The countries in the region look at India as a benign power without having expansionist ambitions and thus

expect India to play balancer vis-a-vis China.

India and Vietnam relations have huge potential to develop strategic relationship especially in the area of defence. The modus operandi of China in SCS with regard to territorial dispute with Vietnam is to make use of maritime militias like fishing boats and coast guard ships among others. This makes it imperative for Vietnam to have strong maritime law enforcement agency like coast guard. India has credible indigenous capabilities to build patrol vessels which has great export potential in case of Vietnam.

Indian plans to export BrahMos missiles to Vietnam must also fructify quickly which is very important for long term Indo-Vietnam defence partnership. Apart from that India should continue insisting on implementation of The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in SCS. India-Vietnam relations are based on mutual trust and respect with the aim of safeguarding national interests of two nations as well as upholding international law. They have positive orientation which makes them ideal to flourish in the future.

Even though there are territorial disputes between both India-Pakistan as well as Vietnam-China, nature of dispute in the case of former is more ideological than territorial. Therefore we need to be extra cautious while looking at Vietnam from the lenses of China-Pakistan relations.

²¹ Abhijit Singh, 'Deciphering China's Submarine Deployments in the Indian Ocean Region', IDSA COMMENT, July 8, 2015, at http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/DecipheringChinasSubmarineDeploymentsintheIndianOceanRegion_asingh_080715 (Accessed November 27, 2015)

Southeast Asia

ASEAN

The 12th China-ASEAN Expo concluded

The 12th China-ASEAN Expo (CAEXPO) and the 12th China-ASEAN Business & Investment Summit (CABIS) were held from September 18 – 21 in Nanning, capital of South China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Both events featured "Building the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, Creating a New Blueprint for Maritime Cooperation" as the theme. The two events, based on the 10+1 cooperation between China and ASEAN and open to cooperation among RCEP countries and countries along the Belt and the Road, coordinated with the efforts of the WTO to promote trade facilitation.

Heads of state and government of China and 6 ASEAN countries attended the CAEXPO and the CABIS, including Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli of China, Deputy Prime Minister Tanasak Patimapragorn of Thailand, Vice President Sai Mauk Kham of Myanmar, Deputy Prime Minister Somsava Lengsavad of Lao PDR, Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc of Vietnam and Mr. Sun Chantol, Senior Minister and Minister of Commerce of Cambodia.

2015 marked the year of the China-ASEAN maritime cooperation as well as the first

year of the full implementation of the "One Belt, One Road" construction.¹

10th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC) concluded in Malaysia

The 10th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC) and its related meetings concluded in Kuala Lumpur on October 1 with the adoption of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on combating transnational crime.

The declaration was signed by the ministers and delegation heads from the 10 ASEAN member countries. The ASEAN leaders, through the declaration, agreed that AMMTC should be convened on an annual basis since transnational crimes were on the rise with the emergence of new crimes. They also agreed to preserve ASEAN's central role and the region's interest in relation to regional frameworks and mechanisms.

It was decided that ASEAN would encourage the effective implementation of relevant provisions on transnational crimes identified in the post-2015 ASEAN Political-Security Council. They would strive to strengthen the capacity of the criminal justice system, including judges, prosecutors and law enforcement officials within ASEAN, and with relevant regional and international organisations.²

China hosts 10-nation ASEAN amid South China Sea tensions

China hosted a meeting with defence ministers from the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on October 16, amid

¹ The 12th China-ASEAN Expo concluded, China-ASEAN Expo website September 22, 2015, available at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/regional/2015-09/22/content_21949981.htm

² ASEAN committed to fighting trans-national crime, Vietnam+, November 10, 2015 available at <http://en.vietnamplus.vn/asean-committed-to-fighting-transnational-crime/82551.vnp>

rising tensions in the South China Sea. It was first time that china hosted such an event.³

China's Defence Minister Chang Wanquan announced that he was willing to conduct joint drills with Southeast Asian countries in the disputed South China Sea. The purpose of these drills would be to enhance search and rescue capabilities and practice for accidental encounters at sea in the disputed waters. He failed to directly mention the South China Sea dispute in his opening remarks; instead, he focused on regional threats emanating from terrorism, radicalism, and dangers posed by natural disasters and major accidents. He criticized some ASEAN members without directly naming them for disrupting regional cooperation by "playing up tensions and involving external parties in the region".⁴

He further added that China desired cooperation and dialogue with ASEAN defence bodies to together safeguard regional peace and stability and join hands to create a good security environment.

ASEAN-India

India for early ratification of FTA on services with ASEAN

India, on October 14, pitched for early ratification of its long-pending free trade

agreement on services and investment with 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), considered one of the world's fastest growing regions, to pave way for deeper trade and investment between the two sides.

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj conveyed this to Foreign Affairs Secretary of Philippines Albert F Del Rosario during the third India-Philippines Joint Commission meeting in which both sides decided to step up cooperation in areas of defence and security, intelligence sharing, shipping, trade, and pharmaceuticals among others.

Swaraj raised the issue of India-ASEAN FTA on services and investment and pushed for its early ratification. Except Philippines, all ASEAN member countries had signed the pact, which would come into effect only after all members sign it. India had signed a free trade agreement (FTA) in goods with ASEAN in 2009. It was keen on the services deal as it did not gain much from the pact on goods due to already lower tariffs in the region.⁵

Indian Vice President visits Cambodia, Laos

Indian Vice President Hamid Ansari concluded a four-day two-nation tour of Cambodia and Laos on September 18. He said that New Delhi was interested in developing comprehensive ties with ASEAN members to fulfil each other's requirement. Without naming regional super power China, he said that developed nations had a duty to ensure peace, stability and development in the region by resolving all the

³ China Hosts 10-nation ASEAN Amid South China Sea Tensions, The New Indian Express, October 16, 2015, available at <http://www.newindianexpress.com/world/China-Hosts-10-nation-ASEAN-Amid-South-China-Sea-Tensions/2015/10/16/article3082995.ece>

⁴ China Hints At Future South China Sea Maritime Drills With ASEAN, Stephen Paul Brooker, ValueWalk, October 20, 2015, available at <http://www.valuwalk.com/2015/10/future-south-china-sea-drills/>

⁵ India for early ratification of FTA on services with ASEAN, NITI CENTRAL, October 14, 2015, available at <http://news.niticentral.com/2015/10/15/india-for-early-ratification-of-fta-on-services-with-ASEAN/>

outstanding issues through peaceful negotiations. The vice president explained that peace and stability were prerequisites for better trade, investment and business.

Mr. Ansari assured all the ASEAN members that India would play the role of a stabilising force to help them resolve territorial and maritime disputes. According to him, the good relationship between Indian and ASEAN members was the result of interdependency and New Delhi would continue maintaining healthy ties with each and every member of the Southeast Asian political and economic organisation.

He clarified that India had no intention to interfere in disputes involving the ASEAN members and they would have to resolve their problems themselves through their own mechanism. As far as the issue of terrorism was concerned, the Indian leader stressed that the menace had already become an international phenomenon and it should be countered by global co-operation.

The vice president expressed satisfaction over the outcome of his visit to Cambodia and Laos, saying that Phnom Penh and Vientiane agreed to boost their economic relations with New Delhi. During his trip, Ansari emphasised on the importance India attaches to forging close ties in particular with the Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam, commonly known as CLMV countries.⁶

Tripura to supply Bangladesh power from January 2016

Power Minister of Tripura said that Tripura would start giving power to Bangladesh from early 2016. "Bangladesh will get 100 MW electricity from the Palatana power plant from January 2016. Work for the transmission line from Surajmani Nagar (in Tripura) power grid to South Comilla (in Bangladesh) is being done by the PGCIL (Power Grid Corporation of India Ltd)," he said.

India had promised to give 100 MW electricity to Bangladesh from Tripura. Bangladesh had allowed Tripura to use its ports to transport the heavy equipment for the 726MW Palatana project, because it was impossible to bring them over the Assam-Agartala road due to several weak bridges there.⁷

New Waterways in Offing to Link India-Bangladesh

After Myanmar, India is planning to open new waterways with Bangladesh, a move that would facilitate the movement of people, goods and machinery between them and hugely help landlocked northeastern India.

According to union Minister for Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) Jitendra Singh, India was prioritizing multi-modal connectivity in the northeastern region, including water connectivity, and already 16 waterway projects, mostly involving Bangladesh, had been approved for the region.

"To expedite Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Act East Policy, multi-modal connectivity in the

⁶ India Distances Itself From ASEAN Disputes, Koushik Das, Insearbia, September 22, 2015, available at <http://insearbia.info/today/2015/09/india-distances-itself-from-ASEAN-disputes/>

⁷ Tripura to supply Bangladesh power from January 2016, bdnews24, October 29, 2015, available at <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2015/10/29/tripura-to-supply-bangladesh-power-from-january-2016>

northeastern region, mostly involving Bangladesh, has been undertaken on a priority basis to increase bilateral trade and to increase the movement of people," Mr Singh said.

"The shipping ministry, in association with the ministry of external affairs, was looking into this. Assam, Tripura and other northeastern states would be benefited to a large extent under these ambitious projects", he added. The union cabinet revised the cost of the project from Rs.535 crore to Rs. 2,904 crore. The funds would be given as grant to Myanmar.

India is implementing the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit-Transport Project through Sittwe port in Myanmar to resolve the connectivity problem in the mountainous northeast region. The idea is to have a 225-km waterway from Sittwe Port to Paletwa, both in Myanmar, along the Kaladan river, near Mizoram. A 62-km road would connect Paletwa to the Indian border village of Zochawchhuah in eastern Mizoram.⁸

Northeast Governors briefed on 'Act East Policy'

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj in early October briefed Governors of eight Northeastern states on the 'Act East Policy' and various cross-border connectivity projects that would link the Northeast to the wider region including Myanmar, Bangladesh, Thailand and even Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam. The meeting in

New Delhi covered comprehensively all aspects of India's Act East Policy, with particular focus on how these impacted on the North Eastern region.

Former chairman of CII's Nagaland Council, Dr Aotoshi welcomed Centre's initiative and said that it would increase economic activity in the region.

"We always use to refer the rest of India as mainland India. Now one major benefit that is going to take place because of this look east policy which has been transformed into act east policy as announced by the present government, is that there will be no more mainland & isolated North East because now this region is expected to become a hub of activities, most importantly economic activity and that's a welcome thing," he said.⁹ Air connectivity of India's Northeast with ASEAN countries was one of the prime focus.

Asian Highway to Link India, Myanmar, and Thailand

A new section of the planned Asian highway linking India, Myanmar, and Thailand became operational on August 30. The 25.6 kilometre roadway would reduce travel time between Thinggan Nyenaung and Kawkareik from three hours to 45 minutes.

The newly opened section of the highway was located in the East-West economic corridor of the Greater Mekong Subregion (a development project implemented in 1992 by the World Development Bank and consisting of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and Yunnan Province, China). The road would help

⁸ New Waterways in Offing to Link India-Bangladesh, Northeast Today, October 27, 2015, available at <http://www.northeasttoday.in/new-waterways-in-offing-to-link-india-bangladesh/>

⁹ Northeast Governors briefed on 'Act East Policy', Business Standard, October 10, 2015, available at http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/northeast-governors-briefed-on-act-east-policy-115101000433_1.html

to further grow trade between Myanmar and Thailand and build stronger relationships between the people in the region.

Construction on the Asian highway began in 2012 and, once completed, the road system would stretch 3,200 kilometres from Moreh in India to Thailand's Maesot via Myanmar's Tamu, Mandalay, and Myawaddy. The new road was part of the Asian Highway Project, which was a cooperative project between Asian and European countries, as well as the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, to work together on improving the region's highway systems.¹⁰

Brunei

Brunei, Philippines to enhance defence ties

The proposal to hold joint exercises and training of the armies of the Philippines and Brunei was discussed during the meeting of Philippine Army chief Lt. Gen. Eduardo Ano and Royal Brunei Land Forces (RBLF) commander Brig. Gen. Pengiran Dato Paduka Aminan in Fort Bonifacio on September 3. The aim of the exercise would be to strengthen cooperation and improve interoperability.

Mr Ano said that a bilateral working group could be formed to facilitate the conduct of visits, training exchanges, joint military

exercises and other similar activities. "I believe that as we put in place an Army to Army Working Group, our forces can examine our common capabilities as well as concerns and eventually promote Philippines-Brunei bilateral defence ties," Mr Ano said. He was hopeful that the security ties between the two countries would continue.¹¹

Asia-Pacific intelligence chiefs meet in Brunei on security cooperation

Heads and representatives of military intelligence organizations from 24 countries across the world met in Brunei on September 7 for a conference on pursuing stability through defence intelligence cooperation.

The focus of the 8th Asia-Pacific Intelligence Chiefs Conference (APICC) was on the maritime security, anti-transnational crime and law enforcers' training for combating terrorism.

The conference aimed to promote open dialogue for military intelligence chiefs in the Asia-Pacific region to further build their networks and enhance cooperation towards a more consolidated response to common security challenges. The three-day APICC was jointly organized by Brunei's Ministry of Defence and the United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) and marked the first time Brunei co-hosted the meeting with the United States.

Initiated in Kuala Lumpur by United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) in 2007, APICC served as an annual regional avenue that gave military intelligence chiefs an opportunity to come together, interact closely and discuss

¹⁰ Asian Highway to Link India, Myanmar, and Thailand, ASEAN BRIEFING, September 4, 2015, available at <http://www.aseanbriefing.com/news/2015/09/04/asian-highway-to-link-india-myanmar-and-thailand.html>

¹¹ Philippines, Brunei to enhance defense ties, Alexis Romero, philstar, September 4, 2015, available at <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2015/09/04/1495713/philippines-brunei-enhance-defense-ties>

cooperative matters within the intelligence field.¹²

Cambodia

Cambodia, Thailand agree to tackle illegal border crossing based on humanitarian spirit

Cambodia and Thailand agreed to tackle the illegal border crossing by mutual understanding, in a humanitarian manner and in line with the international standard, as well as based on each country's legal principles and norms.

The deal was reached at the closing ceremony of the 5th Meeting of the Governors along Thai-Cambodian Border Provinces on August 28 between Samdech Kralahom Sar Kheng, Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, and his Thai counterpart, Gen. Anupong Paochinda, in Bangkok, Thailand.

Mr Kheng said that both countries' Interior Ministries agreed to further promote the cooperation in all fields, especially in enforcing the existing border agreements of the two countries, in maintaining peace, stability, security and cross-border crime repression, in facilitating border crossing, goods and agricultural product exchange, trade and investment along the common border, and

tourism, education, health, social affairs, disaster management, labour and vocational training cooperation.

The two sides also agreed to facilitate workers of the two countries in using border pass for border crossing for daily and seasonal work, and asked relevant authorities along the border to implement effectively the minutes of the meeting so that to ensure security, order and development along the border areas. Discussion on the opening of more border gates was also part of the agenda of the meeting.¹³

East Timor

Raul receives PM of East Timor

Army General Raul Castro, President of the councils of State and Ministers, received Dr Rui Maria de Araujo, Prime Minister of East Timor, who was on an official visit to Cuba on October 5.

At Revolution Palace, the two heads of state spoke about the excellent state of bilateral relations and expressed the common willingness of consolidating cooperation bonds, particularly in the field of health. They also talked about other topics on the international agenda. Mr Araujo was accompanied by Dr Hernani F. Coelho da Silva, Minister of Foreign Business and Cooperation; as well as the ambassador to Cuba, Olimpio Miranda Branco.¹⁴

¹² Asia-Pacific intelligence chiefs meet in Brunei on security cooperation, News, Asia&Pacific Edition, Xinhuanet, September 7, 2015, available at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-09/07/c_134597974.htm

¹³ Cambodia, Thailand Agree to Tackle Illegal Border Crossing Based on Humanitarian Spirit, Chea Vannak, AGENCE KAMPUCHEA PRESSE, August 31, 2015, available at <http://www.akp.gov.kh/?p=68091>

¹⁴ Raul Receives PM of East Timor, Cuban News Agency, October 6, 2015, available at <http://www.cubanews.ain.cu/cuba/3850-raul-receives-pm-of-east-timor>

Indonesia

Joko Widodo, Sisi agree on countering extremism

Two protocols on cancelling visas for diplomats as well as government officials and training diplomats were signed during Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi's visit to Jakarta on September 4. Indonesia and Egypt agreed to improve ties, particularly on trade and investment, during bilateral talks.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo said that they exchanged ideas on "moderate Islam" and countering extremism, adding that their outlooks on Middle East issues were similar. He also said that they agreed on promoting their ideas on countering extremism at international fora.

Jokowi deemed El-Sisi's visit a sign of strong ties between Indonesia and Egypt, which was the first country to recognize the sovereign state of Indonesia in 1947, two years after the former colony proclaimed independence.¹⁵

The Egyptian president invited Widodo to visit Cairo, and assured him that Indonesian students and workers in Egypt were safe.¹⁶

Indonesia will join Trans-Pacific Partnership, Jokowi tells Obama

Joko Widodo, President of Indonesia was on a state visit to United States where he told President Obama of United States that Indonesia intended to join Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). "Indonesia intends to join the TPP", he said. "Indonesia is an open economy and with a population of 250 million, we are the largest economy in Southeast Asia."

Twelve countries are currently party to the Trans-Pacific, creating the world's largest free trade area, in what was seen by some as a counterbalance to growing Chinese economic power in the region.

Widodo's visit to the White House was the first by an Indonesian president in a decade and came exactly a year after the former furniture salesman became president.¹⁷

Although, initially the visit was planned on October 25-28, due to haze problem worsening back home, President Widodo had to cut short his visit. He was to travel to San Francisco on the last leg of his visit, where he was to meet officials from Apple, Facebook, Google and Microsoft, as well as fund managers and venture capitalists to pitch Indonesia as "the largest digital economy in Southeast Asia". But those meetings were handed over to other ministers who were accompanying him during the visit.¹⁸

¹⁵ Jokowi, Sisi talk business, advocate peaceful Islam, Ina Parlina, The Jakarta Post, September 5, 2015, available at <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/09/05/jokowi-sisi-talk-business-advocate-peaceful-islam.html>

¹⁶ Sisi, Indonesia's Joko Widodo agree on countering extremism, The Cairo Post, September 4, 2015, available at <http://www.thecairopost.com/news/166025/news/sisi-indonesias-joko-widodo-agree-on-countering-extremism>

¹⁷ Indonesia will join Trans-Pacific Partnership, Jokowi tells Obama, The Guardian, October 27, 2015, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/27/indonesia-will-join-trans-pacific-partnership-jokowi-tells-obama>

¹⁸ Jokowi cuts short US trip to attend to haze crisis, Francis Chan, The Strait Times, October 27, 2015, available at <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/jokowi-cuts-short-us-trip-to-attend-to-haze-crisis>

Laos

Laos, Vietnam agree to strengthen mutual cooperation

Prime Minister of Vietnam Nguyen Tan Dung and his Laotian counterpart Thongsing Thammavong held talks in Vientiane on September 14 to discuss measures to step up cooperation between the two countries across the board.

The PMs expressed their delight at the growing traditional friendship, special solidarity and comprehensive cooperation between the two Parties, States and peoples. They agreed to maintain and promote mutual trust in their political partnerships as well as high-level delegation exchanges under various forms.

Vietnam was one of the biggest investors in Laos with bilateral trade gradually increasing in recent years.

They agreed to enhance transport connections, including a highway project connecting Vientiane-Pac San (Laos) with Thanh Thuy-Hanoi (Vietnam) and the route from Phuthitphong in Luang Prabang province to Naxon bordering Dien Bien Dong district of Vietnam's northern Dien Bien province.

The two PMs also examined regional and international issues of mutual concern and concurred to promote the sound cooperative ties between the two countries at regional and international forums, especially within the cooperation framework of ASEAN to maintain the

common stance and voice of the bloc in regional important strategic issues, including those on the East Sea. Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung confirmed that Vietnam would coordinate closely and offer the utmost assistance to help Laos fulfil the role of ASEAN Chair in 2016.

The Laos PM expressed his belief that the commencement of the kali salt processing project in Laos' Khammouan province on the occasion of PM Nguyen Tan Dung's visit would bring pragmatic benefits for the two sides and would help propel bilateral cooperation forward, especially in economics, trade, investment, labour and technology transfer.

After the talks, the two PMs witnessed the signing of a government Memorandum of Understanding on strategic cooperation in transport from 2016-2025 with a vision to 2030.¹⁹

Malaysia

Malaysia, China concludes first joint military exercise

The first joint military exercise between China and Malaysia, coded "Peace and Friendship 2015," wrapped up in Malaysia on September 22, with both sides believing that it would help the two countries and armies promote mutual trust and deepen pragmatic cooperation in various fields and all levels.

Yi Xiaoguang, deputy chief of the General Staff of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, said in an address at the closing ceremony that during the exercise, the two sides had increased mutual understanding through sincere exchanges, enhanced mutual trust through close

¹⁹ Vietnamese, Lao PMs hold talks to boost cooperation, Vietnam+, September 14, 2015, available at <http://en.vietnamplus.vn/vietnamese-lao-pms-hold-talks-to-boost-cooperation/81631.vnp>

collaboration and promoted friendship through joint tasks.

Mr Yi added that China's armed forces were willing to develop military-to-military relations that were non-confrontational and not directed against any third party. China was committed to promote cooperation and exchanges with defence departments and armed forces from all Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, including Malaysia, to jointly face the new challenges and threats and maintain regional peace.

Malaysian Deputy Defence Minister Mohd Johari Baharum said that the exercise had demonstrated how the armed forces of Malaysia and China could cooperate to achieve their goals. He hoped that there would be more cooperation and more such exercises between China and Malaysia.

The exercise, which began on September 18, included exercises for joint escort, joint search and rescue, hijacked vessel rescue, weapons use, humanitarian rescue and disaster relief. It was the largest bilateral military exercise between China and a country from ASEAN.²⁰

Malaysia, US to step up information exchange on terror, cyber security

Malaysia and the United States decided to step up the exchange of information and intelligence to combat violent extremism, threats on cybersecurity and trans-border crime.

Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said that cooperation in that area was the focus of his discussions with the main intelligence agencies in the United States.

He met CIA director John O Brennan and FBI deputy director Mark F Guilano on October 7, the first day of his official visit to Washington DC.

Bilateral cooperation was set to move up several notches after Dr Ahmad Zahid and US Secretary of State John Kerry signed the Homeland Security Presidential Directive No 6 on October 8. The agreement was critical for the two countries as it involved the exchange of information on terrorists and suspected terrorists, especially in the fight against the threat of the Islamic State militant group.

At the meeting with the CIA and FBI, Dr Ahmad Zahid asked for training to be provided to Malaysian law enforcement agencies in intelligence gathering and cyber security. He informed the agencies that amendments would be made to existing laws to monitor cyberspace and social media.²¹

Myanmar

Myanmar, Bangladesh launch joint drive against Arakan rebels

Myanmar and Bangladesh launched a coordinated security clampdown against rebel Arakan Army on Myanmar-Bangladesh border. Myanmar troops launched a drive as Bangladesh army joined hands with the Border Guard

²⁰ China, Malaysia conclude first joint military exercise, Xinhuanet, September 22, 2015, available at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-09/22/c_134649237.htm

²¹ Malaysia and US to step up intelligence exchange and cooperation, Leanne Goh, THE STAR ONLINE, October 9, 2015, available at <http://www.thestar.com.my/News/Nation/2015/10/09/More-info-swaps-to-fight-terror-Malaysia-and-US-to-step-up-intelligence-exchange-and-cooperation/>

Bangladesh (BGB) against the Burmese separatist group who appeared to be operating from the frontiers of the two countries.

BGB's sector commander in Bandarban Colonel SM Waliur Rahman said "The Myanmar forces have also launched the drive against the Arakan Army in their territories along the border while the Bangladesh army and BGB are carrying out the clampdown since August 27". He added that the Myanmar's action came in line with a call of BGB chief Major General Aziz Ahmed after the Arakan Army attacked a camp of the Bangladeshi border guards after BGB forces seized 15 Arabian horses belonged to the group. The rebel group used the horses for their movement and transporting weapons and other hardware.

The incident prompted Home Minister of Bangladesh Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal and senior army and security officials to visit the scene and order the Army-BGB clampdown against the outfit.²²

Myanmar poll body ready to welcome unlimited international observers

The Union Election Commission (UEC) of Myanmar announced on September 2 that it was open for an unlimited number of international observers in the upcoming election. Tin Aye, chairman of UEC, said that UEC welcomed all international observers to ensure it was conducting a free and fair election.

"We do not have any limit on the number of international observers. But the places where they can go will largely depend on the guarantee of the security forces. Although UEC allows them to go anywhere, we always remind them they should visit only places guaranteed of safety to ensure they are 100 per cent safe," Tin Aye said.

The November 8 election was considered a milestone in Myanmar's political scene, following decades of military ruling. Local and international communities had been all eyes to the event. UEC had signed the memorandum of understanding with European Union and the US's Carter Foundation, and Bangkok-based ASEAN Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) for the election monitoring process. The commission would also sign a similar MoU with the Netherland's Gender Concerns International within a few weeks.²³

Philippines

In defeat for Beijing, Hague court to hear South China Sea dispute

In a legal setback for Beijing, an arbitration court in the Netherlands ruled on October 29 that it had jurisdiction to hear some territorial claims the Philippines had filed against China over disputed areas in the South China Sea.

Manila filed the case in 2013 to seek a ruling on its right to exploit the South China Sea waters in its 200-nautical mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ) as allowed under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

²² Bangladesh, Myanmar launch joint drive against Arakan rebels, Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, August 31, 2015, available at <http://www.bssnews.net/newsDetails.php?cat=0&id=516171&date=2015-08-31>

²³ Myanmar to welcome unlimited number of int'l observers, Khine Kyaw, THE NATION, September 2, 2015, available at <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/breakingnews/Myanmar-to-welcome-unlimited-number-of-intl-observ-30268032.html>

The Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration rejected Beijing's claim that the disputes were about territorial sovereignty and said that additional hearings would be held to decide the merits of the Philippines' arguments.

China boycotted the proceedings and rejected the court's authority in the case. The tribunal found it had authority to hear seven of Manila's submissions under UNCLOS and China's decision not to participate did "not deprive the tribunal of jurisdiction".

Chinese vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin said that the Chinese government, facing international legal scrutiny for the first time over its assertiveness in the South China Sea, would neither participate in nor accept the case. "The result of this arbitration will not impact China's sovereignty, rights or jurisdiction over the South China Sea under historical facts and international law," Liu said.

The Philippine government welcomed the decision. Solicitor General Florin Hilbay, Manila's chief lawyer in the case, said that the ruling represented a "significant step forward in the Philippines' quest for a peaceful, impartial resolution of the disputes between the parties and the clarification of their rights under UNCLOS".²⁴

Singapore

India, Singapore discuss bilateral issues ahead of PM Modi's visit

Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit in November, India and Singapore on October 12 discussed key bilateral issues including defence and decided to revive the Joint Working Group on intelligence cooperation to combat terrorism which was institutionalised in 2004.

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and her Singaporean counterpart Vivian Balakrishnan co-chaired the 4th Joint Commission Meeting, during which they discussed ways to boost maritime cooperation, trade ties and cyber security among other strategic issues, setting a stage for Modi's visit from November 23.

Singapore was also invited to be a special invitee at the India Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) which was held in India from October 26.

During the discussions, the two sides outlined a 'five S' strategy to ramp up bilateral ties - Scaling up trade and investments; Speeding up of air, maritime connectivity; Skill development; Smart city and urban rejuvenation and State focus in enhancing cultural ties.

They agreed to strengthen defence ties with a special focus on maritime security and coastguard cooperation.

Both the sides also stressed better connectivity between India and Association of Southeast

²⁴ In defeat for Beijing, Hague court to hear South China Sea dispute, Anthony Deutsch, Reuters, October 30, 2015, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/10/30/us-philippines-china-arbitration-idUSKCNOSN26320151030#38xMemxkXhZLbXqk.97>

Asian Nations (ASEAN) and in this regard underlined the need for Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

Singapore also reiterated its support for India's bid for membership in the UN Security Council.²⁵

Singapore, Indonesia Conduct Joint Military Exercise

The Singapore and Indonesian armies successfully conducted their annual bilateral exercise. The 27th iteration of Exercise Safkar Indopura, a combined battalion field exercise conducted alternately in each of the two countries, was hosted by Singapore and was held from October 12-23.

It involved about 150 personnel from the Headquarters 3rd Singapore Infantry Brigade and 6th Battalion, Singapore Infantry Regiment, together with about 150 personnel from the Indonesian Army's 7th Infantry Brigade and 121st Infantry Battalion.

The exercise included professional exchanges, cross training on urban operations, live firing, a map training exercise and a combined field training exercise.

Safkar Indopura was the first bilateral

army exercise involving the Singaporean and Indonesian militaries, which had trained together since the 1970s. The conduct of bilateral exercise helped enhance interoperability between the two armed and foster mutual understanding between personnel.²⁶

Thailand

India, Thailand vow to boost defence ties

India and Thailand on September 7 pledged to take bilateral defence ties to greater heights and called for cooperation in several areas including disaster management, information exchange and "sea migration".

Indian Air Chief Marshal Arup Raha who was on an official visit to Thailand held talks with Gen. Worapong Sanganetra, Chief of Defence Forces of Thailand, Commander-in-Chief of Royal Thai Air Force Treetod Sonjance and Gen. Udomdej Sitabutr, Thai Deputy Minister of Defence.

The two sides agreed that cooperation should be increased with the Bay of Bengal countries to deal with the serious issue of sea migration. The Thai side expressed keen interest in the area of development of defence equipment and also for higher level of military to military exchange.

The air chief was presented a guard of honour at the Royal Thai Armed Forces headquarters.²⁷

²⁵ Defence push: India, Singapore discuss key bilateral issues ahead of PM Modi's visit, The Economic Times, October 12, 2015, available at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/defence-push-india-singapore-discuss-key-bilateral-issues-ahead-of-pm-modis-visit/articleshow/49327651.cms>

²⁶ Singapore, Indonesia Conduct Joint Military Exercise, Prashanth Parameswaran, The Diplomat, October 22, 2015, available at <http://thediplomat.com/2015/10/singapore-indonesia-conduct-joint-military-exercise/>

²⁷ India, Thailand to strengthen bilateral defence ties, The Hindu, September 7, 2015, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/india-thailand-to-strengthen-bilateral-defence-ties/article7625581.ece>

Vietnam

Vietnam, India coast guards hold rescue drill at sea

Two Vietnamese coast guard vessels, CSB 8001 and CSB 4043 of Vietnam's Region 3 Coast Guard Command, together with offshore patrol vessel SaRang 44 of India's Coast Guards, took part in a search and rescue mission about 10 nautical miles off the coast of Ba Ria - Vung Tau province of Vietnam on August 30. This was part of the Indian SaRang 44's visit to Vietnam.

At the end of the drill, Commodore Naresh Kumar Kaul said that Vietnam's coast guard was an elite force and fully capable of undertaking all search and rescue missions at sea.

He added that Vietnamese and Indian coast guards faced similar maritime issues, such as piracy, search and rescue at sea, and environmental protection. He also hoped that the Vietnam coast guard would send ships to India for visits.

Colonel Nguyen Ngoc Lan, the region's Deputy Commander and Chief-of-Staff, said that both sides improved their search and rescue abilities through the exercise. The two sides would cooperate in training their troops for search and rescue missions at sea, as well as for other law enforcement tasks.²⁸

Japan pledges more vessels for Vietnam's maritime security

Japan pledged on September 15 to provide more vessels to Vietnam as part of efforts

to boost the Southeast Asian country's maritime law enforcement capability in the wake of China's muscle-flexing in the South China Sea. A bilateral accord extending grant aid worth 200 million yen (\$1.7 million) was signed as part of a set of deals agreed between Japan and Vietnam on the occasion of the visit of Nguyen Phu Trong, General Secretary of Vietnam's ruling Communist Party, to Japan.

A few hours after arriving in Japan on September 15 for a four-day trip, Trong met with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the two leaders reaffirmed their nations' cooperation in boosting maritime security, an issue that was important for Hanoi, which was engaged in a territorial row with Beijing in the South China Sea.

Trong's official visit, his first to Japan since assuming his post in 2011, came at a time when Japan and Vietnam were stepping up their cooperation to counter China's growing maritime assertiveness in the resource rich sea.

According to a joint statement issued after the two leaders' meeting, they "expressed their serious concerns" over massive land reclamation work and building of outposts in the South China Sea.

These activities had "increased tensions, eroded trust and confidence, and threatened peace and stability in the region and the world," the statement said, with the two nations urging concerned parties "not to take any unilateral actions that would complicate and expand the disputes in the South China Sea". Mr Trong also agreed with Mr Abe over the importance of upholding freedom of navigation.

Japan, Vietnam's biggest donor country, also unveiled 28.6 billion yen (\$238.8 million) in

²⁸ Vietnam, India Coast Guards hold rescue drill at sea, VIETNAM BREAKING NEWS, August 31, 2015, available at <http://www.vietnambreakingnews.com/2015/08/vietnam-india-coast-guards-hold-rescue-drill-at-sea/>

loans to build a new general hospital in Ho Chi Minh City in southern Vietnam which was in line with Abe's investment initiative announced in May to provide \$110 billion to promote "quality infrastructure" in Asia over five years.

On a broader scale, the two agreed to continue working for the early conclusion of the US led Trans-Pacific Partnership initiative.²⁹

Oceania

Australia

Indo-Australian Bilateral Cooperation in the field of security

A bilateral meeting between India and Australia was held in New Delhi on September 2 to discuss the bilateral cooperation between the two countries. The visiting Australian Minister of Defence Kevin Andrews and the Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju discussed intelligence sharing, combating international terrorism, cyber security and better working relations for border and maritime security. They also touched upon the issues of stability of Asia Pacific region and security of sea lanes of communication.

The two leaders underscored the growing depth of the Australia-India strategic

partnership and decided to build on converging interests, shared values and common democratic institutions. They discussed bilateral collaboration across the security spectrum, including in counter terrorism, cyber policy and maritime security.

They also discussed the follow-up of the financial action task force in Brisbane, Australia in June 2015 and addressed deficiencies in implementation of the recommendations with regard to terror financing. Mr Rijiju raised the issue of sponsored terrorism by some neighbouring countries and global efforts to curtail terror funding. The visiting Defence Minister discussed the situation in the middle-east and in Afghanistan and expressed his concern. They also agreed for enhanced cooperation in the areas of mutual interest of both the countries.

The visiting Australian Defence Minister was attending the Second Australia-India Defence Minister's dialogue. The Australian delegation included the High Commissioner and Defence Attaches of Australia in India. Both the countries agreed to further enhance bilateral assistance in the areas of mutual co-operation and extend the co-operation to newer areas.³⁰

Fiji

Fiji PM urges Australia to put neighbours first

Fiji's Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama urged Australia to abandon its membership of the

²⁹ Japan pledges more vessels for Vietnam's security amid maritime dispute with China, South China Morning Post, September 15, 2015, available at <http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/southeast-asia/article/1858470/japan-pledges-more-vessels-vietnams-security-amid-maritime>

³⁰ Indo-Australian Bilateral Co-operation in the field of security, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, Press Information Bureau, September 2, 2015, available at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=126568>

“coalition of the selfish” and do more to combat climate change.

“(Prime Minister Tony) Abbott, it is time to put the welfare and survival of your Pacific Island neighbours before the expansion of your existing coal industry,” Frank Bainimarama told leaders at the Pacific Island Development Forum meeting in Suva.

Fiji set up a rival club of Pacific nations to protest Australia and New Zealand’s heavy influence on the Pacific Islands Forum.³¹

New Zealand

New Zealand, China pledge to deepen military cooperation

Senior defence officials from China and New Zealand pledged more cooperation between their militaries on September 28.

In his meeting with New Zealand’s Defence Minister Gerry Brownlee, Fan Changlong, vice chairman of China’s Central Military Commission, said that the two countries enjoyed strong ties which acted as a case study of win-win cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.

Mr Brownlee said that he had witnessed China’s development and its contribution to world peace and stability and New Zealand was ready to make joint efforts with China to enhance military communication and cooperation.

Chinese Defence Minister Chang Wanquan also held talks with Mr Brownlee. He said that two militaries had frequent high-level visits, smooth strategic communication and more pragmatic cooperation in recent years.

Brownlee said that New Zealand attached importance to the ties with China, and there were fruitful achievements in the fields of politics, economy, military and people-people exchanges.³²

Papua New Guinea

China president meets Papua New Guinea governor-general

Chinese President Xi Jinping met with Papua New Guinea (PNG) Governor-General Michael Ogio on September 1, with both vowing more cooperation between their countries. He welcomed Mr Ogio for his attendance of commemorations of the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II.

He thanked the PNG government and people for their maintenance of a cemetery for Chinese war dead in Rabaul, PNG.

Mr Xi said that China and PNG had supported each other and cooperated for mutual benefit and common development since the establishment of diplomatic relations. The two countries had held exchanges in areas of trade, investment, agriculture, education and health. China was willing to work with PNG to organize more exchanges and strengthen dialogue.

³¹ Fiji PM urges Aust to put neighbours first, The Australian, September 3, 2015, available at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/latest-news/fiji-pm-urges-aust-to-put-neighbours-first/story-fn3dxiwe-1227510826035>

³² China, New Zealand pledge more military cooperation, Global Times, September 28, 2015, available at <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/944940.shtml>

He viewed the two countries' economies as highly complementary to each other, and suggested the two sides integrate their development strategies. He expressed appreciation for PNG's efforts in boosting regional cooperation among Pacific islands nations, and said that China supported the country as the host of an APEC summit in 2018.

Mr Ogio agreed that since the establishment of diplomatic ties more than 30 years ago, PNG's relationship with China had been strong. He voiced appreciation for China's help and said that PNG was willing to deepen cooperation with China.³³

³³ President Xi meets Papua New Guinea governor-general, Xinhuanet, September 1, 2015, available at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-09/01/c_134576868.htm

ABOUT US

The Southeast Asia and Oceania Centre focuses on policy-relevant research in respect of the ten ASEAN states, East Timor and Oceania, including Australia and New Zealand. The Centre studies India's bilateral and multilateral relations with states of the region with a view to providing contemporary relevance to India's Look East policy. It has a futuristic approach and examines the emerging trends in the regional security architecture. The Centre studies the potential for India's enhanced defence cooperation (including maritime issues) and cooperation in non-traditional security issues with the region. It examines internal developments of countries in this region, especially political transition and the role of the military, and their implications for India. The Centre seeks to promote Track-II institutional linkages with the region.

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