

The Indo-Pacific Bulletin

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At a Glance

India & Malaysia Conduct Joint Military Exercise 'Harimau Shakti'

Australia-US vow to Increase Cooperation in Indo-Pacific

External Foreign Affairs Minister meets German Foreign Minister

Australia-Japan hold 10th 2+2 Ministerial Consultations

Vietnam diversifies from Russian reliance with its First Defense Expo



India & Malaysia Conduct Joint Military Exercise 'Harimau Shakti'

On 29 November 2022, a joint military exercise involving the troops of India and Malaysia began with an aim to enhance inter-operability in the planning and execution of various operations in the jungle terrain. The India-Malaysia joint military exercise, 'Harimau Shakti-2022', commenced at Pulai, Kluang, Malaysia, and will culminate on December 12. This exercise is an annual training event between the Indian Army and the Malaysian Army being held since 2012. The joint exercise schedule includes the establishment of a joint command post, joint surveillance centre, sharing expertise in employment of aerial assets, technical demonstrations, casualty management & casualty evacuation apart from planning logistics at the Battalion level. Joint field training exercises, joint combat discussions, and joint demonstrations will culminate with a two-day validation exercise where a special emphasis will be on enhancing tactical skills and enhancing inter-operability between the forces and promoting army-to-army relations. Harimau Shakti will enhance the level of defence cooperation between the Indian Army and the Malaysian Army, which in turn will further foster the bilateral relations between the two nations. Combat-experienced troops of the Garhwal Rifles Regiment of the Indian Army and the Royal Malay Regiment of the Malaysian Army are participating in the exercise this year to share experiences gained during operations in order to enhance inter-operability in planning and execution of various operations in jungle terrain.



Australia-US vow to increase cooperation in Indo-Pacific

On 6 December 2022, Australia and the United States have announced plans to increase cooperation for maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific region. This commitment was made as US State Secretary Antony Blinken and Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin hosted Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Defence Minister Richard Marles on Monday in Washington to advance cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, according to a statement released by Pentagon. The two countries also released a statement on the occasion of the 32nd annual Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN). They committed to enhancing deterrence and resilience through coordinated efforts to offer Indo-Pacific nations support to resist subversion and coercion of any kind. Defence and Foreign ministers of the US and Australia committed to strengthening their engagement with Indo-Pacific countries to promote economic development and security. They reiterated their strong opposition to destabilizing actions in the South China Sea, such as the militarization of disputed features and dangerous encounters at sea and in the air. They also expressed concern about other actions by the People's Republic of China (PRC), including it asserting excessive maritime claims that are inconsistent with international law. The ministers resolved to work with partners to support regional maritime security and reiterated Taiwan's role as a leading democracy in the Indo-Pacific region.



External Foreign Affairs Minister meets German Foreign Minister

On 6 December 2022, External Affairs Minister of India, S Jaishankar met with the visiting German Foreign Minister, Annalena Baerbock and discussed wide-ranging issues including the Ukraine conflict, the Indo-Pacific region, and developments in Afghanistan. Addressing a joint press conference, Jaishankar said both ministers also touched upon the issue of multilateral issues, including the reforms of the UN Security Council and India's G20 Presidency. Baerbock arrived in India on Monday on a two-day visit, four days after India formally took over the presidency of the G-20 grouping. The two ministers spoke about a number of issues, including the Ukraine war, China, Pakistan and terrorism. Talking about the challenge posed by China in the Indo-Pacific region, Baerbock, said, "China is seen as a partner in global challenges, a global competitor and increasingly a systemic rival as well. China has changed a lot in the last few years. We will have more diversification in the Indo-Pacific area. There is huge potential for German companies, which until now have been focused on China, will be focusing on Japan and India in the future." On India's intervention efforts in the continuing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Jaishankar reiterated the remarks made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the G20 summit in November, "India's position is clearly articulated by our Prime Minister, which states that today is 'not an era of war' but of diplomacy and dialogue. It is not for India to specify or advocate, that is not our intention. It is something that the parties involved would decide."



Australia-Japan hold 10th 2+2 Ministerial Consultations

On 9th December 2022, Australia and Japan held the Tenth Japan-Australia 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Consultations in Tokyo. The two sides reaffirmed their Special Strategic Partnership which is based on their shared values, including an unwavering commitment to democracy, human rights, free trade and a rules-based international order. The two sides underlined the importance of their respective alliances and their trilateral cooperation with the United States, including through the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue, which underpins peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. Both sides also shared their commitment to work towards the vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific through cooperation with India and the United States under frameworks such as the Quad. The two sides held that they have a vision of an Indo-Pacific that is inclusive and resilient, where sovereignty and international law, including universal human rights, are upheld. They also discussed about continuing effective and practical cooperation in the Pacific, including working within established Pacific architecture such as the Pacific Islands Forum, to address the needs and priorities of the Pacific island countries. They decided to mutually reinforce their respective enhanced approaches to Southeast Asia, and working together towards mutually decided priorities with the ASEAN and Southeast Asian partners.

Vietnam diversifies from Russian reliance with its First Defense Expo

On 8 December 2022, Vietnam International Defence Expo 2022 opened, marking the Vietnamese government's shift from an overreliance on Russia for arms as Moscow becomes increasingly isolated following its invasion of Ukraine in February. Hosted by the country's defense ministry, this expo is taking place at the Gia Lam Airport, a military airstrip in Hanoi, with about 170 exhibitors from 30 countries, until Saturday. The event was originally planned for 2020 but was postponed due to the COVID pandemic. The government plans to run the event every two years. In his remarks at the opening ceremony, Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh said, "The international defense expo opens opportunities for cooperation, study, research of the latest developing trends of defense and security industry around the world." The expo could give Vietnam the chance to diversify its arms trading channels and receive technology transfers from foreigners. Vietnam had been relying on Russia for over 70% of its imported weapons, and most of its large equipment is made in Russia. The two countries have maintained close defense ties since the era of the Soviet Union and the Cold War, when Moscow assisted North Vietnam during the Vietnam War. The exhibitors participating in the first defense expo include not only JSC Rosoboronexport of Russia but also Lockheed Martin of the US., Airbus of Europe, BrahMos Aerospace of India and Mitsubishi Electric of Japan. Dutch exhibitor Damen Shipyards Group is another company keen to seize on the opportunities in Vietnam.

