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Ministry of Defence
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India Favours Early Conclusion of Code of Conduct on South China Sea by Consensus

The Defence Minister Shri Manohar Parrikar today expressed India's hope 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.

Addressing the 3rd ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM-plus) at Kuala Lumpur, Shri Parrikar said the situation in the South China Sea and recent developments there have attracted interest and 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 recognized principles of international law including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, are of concern to all of us", he stated. He also hoped that the Code of Conduct on the South China Sea would be concluded at an early date by consensus.

Following is the full text of the Defence Minister's address:

"I am honoured to represent India at the 3rd Meeting of the ADMM-Plus. My delegation is grateful for the outstanding hospitality extended to us since our arrival yesterday. I would also like to thank our host, Malaysia, for the excellent arrangements made for this meeting.

In a short span of time since its foundation in 2010, the ADMM-Plus has emerged as a compact and useful forum for discussing security issues among officials of the Ministries of Defence of our region. Our meetings at the level of ministers and other activities undertaken under the aegis of the ADMM-Plus are contributing to greater trust and confidence within the region.

2015 is an important year for the ASEAN. We congratulate ASEAN on its impressive achievements and wish the ASEAN Community greater success. 2015 is also the 10th anniversary of the EAST Asia Summit, whose membership footprint matches with that of ours.

ASEAN is at the heart of India's 'Act East Policy' and is central to our dream of an Asian century. As neighbours and as countries belonging to the same region, India and ASEAN member states face common security challenges both traditional and non-traditional. The overriding priority for all of us is development and the transformation of the lives of our people. A peaceful and stable regional and international security environment is critical to our goal.

India has been working bilaterally and multilaterally with all the States represented here to enhance the security and stability of the region from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific. Our efforts include joint military exercises in areas such as disaster response and humanitarian assistance, training and capacity building in areas such as navigational safety and cyber security, exchange of perspectives and cooperation on counter terrorism and support for ASEAN-led initiatives for security cooperation.

ASEAN has also led useful and constructive discussions in the past couple of years on the regional security architecture. India was pleased to co-host with Cambodia, the 4th Workshop on the Regional Security Architecture in July this year. We welcome the very useful and constructive ideas presented by Indonesia, Thailand, China, Russia, Japan and others and we share the common assessment that any future framework must be centered on the 18-member EAS as a premier leaders-led forum for dialogue on strategic issues thereby reinforcing ASEAN's centrality in the evolving architecture. India would like to see a closer relationship between the EAS and the ADMM-Plus.

The five areas of cooperation that we have identified for work in the ADMM-Plus, namely, HADR, maritime security, military medicine, counter terrorism and peace-keeping operations – have progressed well through the mechanism of Expert Working Groups (EWG). India was honoured to co-Chair within Vietnam the EWG on the new area of humanitarian mine action last year. We look forward to hosting ADMM-Plus experts in the joint Humanitarian Mine Action and UN peacekeeping Operations Field Training Exercise in March 2016 in India in Pune. Going forward, we should give thought to future areas of cooperation and dialogue beyond the 2014-17 cycle. In this regard, I propose that we look at the welfare of ex-servicemen and veterans as an area of exchange of national experiences.

We are all concerned with the persistent threat of terrorism and radicalism. There can be no justification for acts of terrorism and we have to work resolutely to choke off recruitments, funding and arms for terrorists. We commend Malaysia's initiative on Global Movement of Moderates and other efforts to combat radicalisation.

Maritime security is again a common challenge. The seas and oceans in our region are critical enablers of our prosperity. The situation in the South China Sea and recent developments there have attracted interest and 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 recognized principles of international law including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, are of concern to all of us. 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.

Let me conclude by assuring you, Mr Chairman, and all my colleagues in the ADMM-Plus our full cooperation in achieving the objectives we have set for this forum. We wish Malaysia all the very best with the Summits you would be hosting shortly.

I thank you for your attention.”

NAo/DM/RAJ

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