

India quietly expands ties with Mongolia

India is quietly expanding its defence and security links with Mongolia in a bid to monitor China's space and military activities in the region.

Furthering these links presently are four Indian Army colonels attending the 10-day Khaan Quest 2007 command post exercise (CPX) in the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar.

Co-hosted by Mongolia and the US, the meet ends Aug 10 and is to be followed by the third joint Mongolian-Indian military exercise - Nomadic Elephant - at the Five Hills Training Centre, 65 km west of Ulaanbaatar, later in the year, defence sources said.

The two armies had earlier carried out joint peace-keeping manoeuvres in Mongolia in October 2004, followed a year later by a second round of bilateral exercises at the Counter-Insurgency Jungle Warfare School (CIJWS) at Vairangte in India's Mizoram state bordering Myanmar.

The CIJWS manoeuvres were attended by visiting Mongolian Defence Minister T.S. Sharavdorj, whose arrival celebrated 50 years of bilateral diplomatic relations between [New Delhi](#) and Ulaanbaatar.

These have steadily proliferated since the late 1990s as part of New Delhi's 'Look East' policy and strategy to build strategic ties with China's neighbours.

India was the first non-socialist country to recognize Mongolia, which opened its embassy in New Delhi in 1956. India's diplomatic mission in Mongolia commenced 15 years later in 1971.

During Sharavdorj's visit, the two sides constituted a Joint Defence Working Group that succeeded the 2001 Agreement on Defence Cooperation, which included joint exercises and reciprocal visits by military officers.

Building on the existing goodwill and recent diplomatic and security initiatives, India plans on expanding and upgrading its 'listening posts' in Mongolia erected after the January 2004 cooperation protocol between its Department of Space and the Mongolian Ministry of Infrastructure.

The agreement provides an umbrella for cooperation in space science, technology and undefined applications.

It also covers studies related to satellite communication, satellite-related remote sensing and satellite meteorology. Also included in the protocol are satellite ground stations and satellite mission management, training facilities and exchange of scientists.

As an adjunct to this agreement, official sources said India is also believed to be considering erecting Early Warning (EW) radar at undisclosed locations in Mongolia with the capability of monitoring Chinese missile tests in the vast surrounding desert region as well as Beijing's expanding space programme.

Alongside, New Delhi has plans to enlarge its Ulaanbaatar embassy by stationing additional security services and military personnel in Mongolia to manage these proposed assets, official sources said.

Meanwhile, around 240 Service members from 15 countries are attending the Khaan Quest 2007 CPX, co-financed by the Global Peace Operations Initiative of the US State Department and the Mongolian government, focusing on multinational peace support operations.

Other than India the participants include Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, France, Germany, Indonesia, Nepal, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Tonga.

UN representatives, the International Committee of the Red Cross and USAID are also present.

Taking place simultaneously at the Five Hills Training Centre is the fortnight-long field training exercise (FTX) involving some 1,000 military personnel drawn from five countries in addition to hosts Mongolia and the US.

These include Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, South Korea and Sri Lanka, all of whom have fielded personnel.

China and Russia, though invited, have only deployed observers for FTX that aims at developing core competencies for peace operations with emphasis on improving the multinational speed of response to situations, mission effectiveness and interoperability.

Meanwhile, furthering its fledgling China 'containment' strategy, India signed a defence agreement with Vietnam in July as a possible prelude to New Delhi selling weapons to Hanoi.

The defence agreement concluded during Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung's New Delhi visit built upon similar earlier agreements in 2000 that stressed greater military co-operation, sale of advanced light helicopters and assistance in overhauling and providing spares to Hanoi's ageing MiG series fighter aircraft.

This also provided a framework under which Vietnamese officers would train the Indian Army in jungle warfare and counter-insurgency operations. It also provided for bilateral co-operation between India's Coast Guard and the Vietnamese Sea Police in combating piracy.

Reciprocal visits by senior military officers, regular exchange of intelligence and a periodic dialogue between the Indian and Vietnamese defence ministers were also included in the agreement.

Proposals to supply Hanoi India's locally developed SSM Prithvi missiles were also reportedly discussed besides the possibility of training Vietnamese nuclear scientists in Indian atomic establishments. But little seems to have emerged from these discussions.

Military co-operation, however, picked up apace.

Two Indian Navy warships visited Vietnam this year and in 2005 the Indian Navy ferried 150 tonnes of spares to Hanoi for its Russian Petya and OSA-II class missile boats.

Indian officials view the burgeoning military ties with China's neighbours as New Delhi's attempts to strengthen security relations with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to counter Beijing's growing regional military presence.

These moves are also reciprocated, albeit subtly, by several ASEAN states.

'Through these alliances India is mirroring China's game plan of befriending neighbours in order to develop strategic leverage,' former Lt. Gen. V.K. Kapoor said.

China, he said, had military alliances not only with Pakistan, Myanmar and Bangladesh but was swiftly enhancing defence ties with Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and even the Maldives.

'India's military ties with Mongolia and Vietnam are still at a fledgling stage and need consolidation,' Gen. Kapoor added.

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