

Pakistan, Iran participation in Navy conclave uncertain

Pakistan and Iran are yet to confirm their participation in the Indian Navy's pioneering initiative, a 31-nation regional conclave which will underline New Delhi's pivotal role in the maritime security of the Indian Ocean.

'Twenty-six nations are already on board, but we are yet to hear from Pakistan and Iran about their participation,' an official source told IANS.

Thirty-one countries, including Australia, Singapore, Pakistan, Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, have been invited for the Indian Ocean Navy Symposium (IONS) here Feb 14-18 next year.

The interactive conclave, modelled on the Western Pacific Naval Symposium of the US Navy and organised in collaboration with the Indian external affairs ministry, will coincide with the biennial Defexpo international exposition.

The symposium would be preceded by a daylong session of the chiefs of naval staffs of the participating countries, which will discuss a host of issues to promote enhanced cooperation to tackle challenges of maritime piracy, terrorism, security of crucial sea-lanes in the Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea and Red Sea.

IONS would be conducted in two parts. The first two days will be devoted to a seminar that would consider an overview of the maritime scenario in the Indian Ocean region. It would also discuss contemporary maritime challenges like piracy, terrorism, security of crucial sea-lanes in the Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea and Red Sea and ways to ensure synergy through cooperative approaches.

The next three days would be devoted to a closed-door conclave of navy chiefs of the participating countries aimed at establishing mechanisms to mitigate security concerns of the region and develop interoperability among its navies.

The ambitious symposium is reflective of India's growing clout on the global stage and underlines the key role leading regional and world players expect India to play in the maritime security of the Indian Ocean.

China and the US, leading maritime powers, have been excluded from the IONS, as they are not littoral states.

'The establishment of a regional naval grouping would promote greater mutual interaction and curtail growing dependency on extra regional players in the region,' Navy Chief Admiral Sureesh Mehta said early this month while announcing the decision to launch the regional enclave.

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