

INSIGHT SOUTHEAST ASIA

Looking Eastwards From New Delhi



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

Contents

- **Biden Invites ASEAN Leaders to the US**
- **India-Indonesia to Enhance Cooperation in Indo-Pacific**
- **India Army Chief Meets Singapore Defence Minister**
- **Japan holds 2+2 with the Philippines**
- **Cambodia strengthens ties with Japan, India**
- **Myanmar Military calls Ethnic Militia for Peace Talks**
- **India and Vietnam Strengthen Relationship**

Southeast Asia & Oceania Digest

May 2022

The war in Ukraine has maximized the polarization between Russia and the West, compelling many countries like India and the Southeast Asian nations to maintain a difficult balancing act. They have stakes in economic and defence linkages with Russia which makes decoupling extremely difficult if not impossible. Russia is Southeast Asia's largest defence exporter with as much as [80 percent of arms](#) import in Vietnam coming from Russia. It is also a leading exporter to Myanmar and Thailand. Given that diversification is not easy, if the EU comes up with a similar American law as the CAATSA, relations between the west and Southeast Asian countries may be put under strain.

Biden Invites ASEAN Leaders to the US

President Biden will host the leaders of the Southeast Asian nations in Washington for a 'special summit' on 12-13 May, 2022. The US recognizes the significance of the strategic region of Southeast Asia and this may be seen as an attempt to reassure the bloc's leaders of continued US commitment. The summit will commemorate [45 years of relationship](#) between the US and the ASEAN. The threat of China's expansionism in the disputed areas of South China Sea, a potential attack on Taiwan by China, and security implications of North Korea's belligerent nuclear posture may be on the agenda for talks. The US has reiterated that it aims to focus its energies on the Indo-Pacific instead of being pulled into a crisis in Eurasia. It remains to be seen how Washington pursues its foreign policy as the Ukraine crisis unfolds.

India-Indonesia to Enhance Cooperation in Indo-Pacific

The two countries held the seventh round of foreign office consultations on 14 April, 2022 in Jakarta, and underscored the need

to increase bilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific through [greater connectivity](#) between India's Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Indonesia's Aceh province. The two sides exchanged views on a number of issues including cooperation within G20 and global developments. Indonesia's strategic importance in the Indo-Pacific and regional leadership role has been on the rise. Recently, its PT Len Industri and France's Thales have signed a strategic partnership agreement to [collaborate on defence](#) production. Indonesia has been looking to modernise its defence and also boost indigenous production of arms.

India Army Chief Meets Singapore Defence Minister

India's Chief of Army Staff General Manoj Mukund Naravane called on Singapore's Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen on 5 April, 2022 at Singapore Ministry of Defence on his [introductory visit](#) to Singapore from 4-6 April. He also called on the Chief of Army Brigadier-General David Neo and visited several military bases. Singapore has emerged as one of the most formidable military forces in Southeast Asia, especially in context to defence spending and military technology. [Thailand's Chief of Defence](#) Forces General Chalermphon Sriswasdi visited Singapore on 25 April, 2022 and called on the Defence Minister. They discussed deepening of bilateral defence cooperation and General Srisawasdi visited HADR Coordination Centre and Information Fusion Centre at Changi Naval base. Singapore has successfully hedged between the US and China, and maintains close relations with both large powers.

Japan holds 2+2 with the Philippines

The two countries agreed to work [towards a defence pact](#) that will facilitate joint exercises and reciprocal visits of their forces. The Philippines stand-off with China over disputed islands (Scarborough shoal) in the South China Sea indicated China's expansionist posture in the region. Japan is also in conflict with China over the

Senkaku islands. The potential pact may help Japan and Philippines strengthen operational preparedness against Chinese aggression. Manila has recently finalised a deal with India to purchase BrahMos missiles which will boost its deterrent capabilities. India's Ambassador to the Philippines Shambhu Kumaran said that this deal can pave way for [wider cooperation](#) between the countries on areas such as cybersecurity and emerging technologies.

Cambodia strengthens ties with Japan, India

Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen met with Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on the sidelines of the 4th Asia-Pacific Water Summit held in Japan on 23-24 April, 2022. He proposed that the strategic partnership between their two countries may be elevated to [Comprehensive Strategic Partnership](#) in the near future, which PM Kishida accepted. He also met Japanese investors and said that cooperation with Japan will be a 'core component' for turning Cambodia into a high-income nation by 2050. Secretary (East) at India's Ministry of External Affairs, Saurabh Kumar [visited Phnom Penh](#) on 10-11 April, 2022 and held bilateral talks with his counterpart, Secretary of State at Cambodia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Koy Kuong. The two sides agreed to deepen bilateral relations, especially in areas of defence and security, health, and connectivity. Cambodia and India celebrate 75 years of diplomatic relations in 2022. Their bilateral relations are significant for India's Act East policy of engagement with East and Southeast Asian countries.

Myanmar Military calls Ethnic Militia for Peace Talks

Myanmar's junta leader General Min Aung Hlaing has called ethnic militia to engage in [peace talks](#). These ethnic armies control

border regions in Myanmar and have been waging a war against the military junta since even before the coup in 2021. General Hlaing asked the ethnic groups to send names of their representatives who will participate in the talks by 9 May, 2022. Karen and Kachin militia groups have already shown disregard for the proposed talks. Aung San Suu Kyi has [told people](#) to "be united" and "discuss and talk patiently" as she undergoes legal proceedings. Meanwhile an alliance of [anti-junta forces](#) have continued attacking military posts. Artillery and air force bases and a police station in the Magway region were attacked.

India and Vietnam Strengthen Relationship

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and General Secretary of Communist Party of Vietnam Nguyen Phu Trong held discussions on 15 April, 2022 on a range of issues including the crisis in Ukraine and the prevailing [situation in the South China Sea](#). The two leaders agreed to strengthen defence cooperation and PM Modi requested for greater access for India's pharmaceutical and agricultural products in Vietnam. They also expressed satisfaction over the progress made under Comprehensive Strategic Partnership signed between the two countries in 2016. Vietnam is one of the main claimants in the South China Sea dispute and has also been at odds with China over maritime incursions into its territory. Vietnam has used diplomacy to hedge among large powers and consolidate its position. Its Ministry of National Defence held a conference on 14 April, 2022 to review [Vietnam's international integration](#) and defence diplomacy in the period 2016-2021. It found that defence diplomacy was used "concertedly, comprehensively, flexibly and effectively across aspects, recording important achievements."