

CWA # 947, 07 May 2023

ASEAN- India Maritime Exercise, and President Marcos' US Visit

Teshu Singh and Rishika Yadav



ASEAN- India Maritime Exercise 2023 (Image Source: The Hindu)

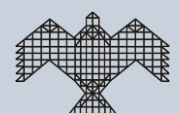
ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise: Towards Maritime Domain Coordination

Teshu Singh

What happened?

On 2 May 2023, the first phase of the ASEAN India Maritime Exercises (AIME) started at the Changi Naval Base. The second phase will be conducted from 7-8 May 2023 in the South China Sea (SCS). The naval exercise involved nine ships, six aircraft and over 1800 personnel from the ASEAN Member States and India.

The opening ceremony of the AIME-23 was held at the Changi Naval Base in Singapore. INS Delhi and INS Satpura participated from the Indian side. INS Delhi is India's first indigenously-built guided missile destroyer and INS Satpura is an indigenously-built guided missile stealth frigate. They are part of the Indian Navy's Eastern Fleet located at Visakhapatnam. The ships will also take part in the International Maritime Defence Exhibition (IMDEX-23) and International Maritime Security Conference (IMSC) being hosted by Singapore.



What is the background?

First, a brief note on the objectives of the first India-ASEAN exercise - building trust and increasing operationality among navies. Amid the rising Chinese assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in the South China Sea, it is the first naval exercise between India and ASEAN countries. The frequency of the exercises has not been decided yet. It gives both sides an opportunity to familiarize themselves and collaborate on the naval front seamlessly. The Chief of Naval Staff of the Indian Navy has said that the “important outcome of these exercises is to build trust between various participants”.

Second, ASEAN is a peacebuilder. Because of the increasing demand for trade and economic growth, ASEAN is conducive to making supply chains resilient and preparing for any human-induced shock. ASEAN lies at the core of India’s Act East Policy and is crucial for framing overarching security architecture to enable development and prosperity for all.

Third, militarised the South China Sea. China has militarized the SCS region by building artificial islands, occupying islands and reefs by force and using other means to maintain its sovereignty over the region. China claims the region on historical grounds and has maintained ambiguity about its clear position in the region. In 2016, China refused to comply with the Permanent Court of Arbitration award/verdict that was in favour of the Philippines. Recently, China has been aggressive in the Indo-Pacific region. China has held its second ferocious drill in the Taiwan Strait and has been luring the ASEAN countries with cheque-book diplomacy. China is also cautiously looking at the India-China border. At the 20th Party Congress of China, Xi Jinping included people with experience in dealing with India.

Fourth, conflict over resources. There is a conflict in the SCS region between China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Taiwan. The dispute is over the strategic value of the islands and the vast mineral resources that lie underneath.

What does it mean?

Strategically, the South China Sea region is of vital importance to India. Almost 55 per cent of the Indian trade passes through the region. India does not have any territorial claims but has economic interests in the region. Indian vision of the Indo-Pacific underscores the importance of ASEAN centrality. By conducting the exercises, India becomes the fourth country after the US, Russia and China to hold ASEAN +1 naval exercises. Overall, the objective of AIME 2023 is to achieve coordination with ASEAN countries in maritime domain awareness, build maritime defence capabilities of the ASEAN countries and support them in acquiring the advanced platform that India is producing.

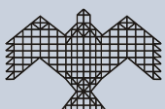
The Philippines: President Bongbong Marcos’ US visit

Rishika Yadav

What happened?

On 04 May, Philippines President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Romualdez Marcos Jr. concluded his four-day official visit to reaffirm the special relationship between the Philippines and the United States. President Marcos attended a business forum hosted by the US Chamber of Commerce and met with several US CEOs and investors. This was the first visit by a Philippines President in over 10 years.

On 02 May, he also delivered a speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a think tank in Washington, D.C., where he outlined his vision for the Philippines' role in the



Indo-Pacific region. He met with members of the US Congress and Filipino-American community leaders to garner cooperation among stakeholders important for both countries. Both leaders anticipate meeting at Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic Leaders' Week in San Francisco in November 2023, to promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth in the region.

On 01 May, according to a White House joint statement, issued by the White House, the leaders of the United States, US and the Philippines acknowledged the strong bonds of friendship, community, and shared sacrifice that form the basis of the U.S.-US-Philippines alliance. President Marcos met with President Joe Biden at the White House and discussed issues related to the economy, security, and China. This was the first visit by a Philippines President in over 10 years.

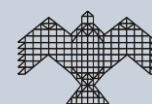
What is the background?

First, the Chinese harassment of Philippine maritime activities. President Marcos denounced China's dangerous actions in the South China Sea, leading the US State Department to warn China to stop its provocative and unsafe behaviour. The Philippines accuses China of aggressive tactics in the disputed waters, with high tensions due to China's chasing off the smaller Philippine Coast Guard patrols. Marcos hopes to discuss how military agreements can "evolve" to counter China's aggression in the disputed waters. Moreover, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin warned that the US-Philippines military cooperation should not interfere with South China Sea disputes or harm China's territorial sovereignty and interests.

Second, increased US-Philippines defence cooperation. The US and the Philippines have just concluded their largest annual military exercise -Balikatan, and are seeking to deepen cooperation in areas such as land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace. The US is supporting the modernization of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, including transferring C-130 military transport aircraft and cyclone class coastal patrol vessels to enhance the country's maritime tactical lift capacity. The US pledged over USD 100 million for Philippine military sites and helicopters, while the Philippines supported the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity, and both sides have agreed to complete a roadmap in the coming months for the delivery of US defence assistance over the next five to ten years.

Third, the "island chain" strategy. The Island chain strategy is a strategic maritime containment plan by the US, to surround the Soviet Union and China with naval bases in the West Pacific to project power and restrict sea access. Moreover, the Philippines being a crucial link, is allowing the US access to nine military sites, up from five, under an expansion of the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement. President Marcos urged US President Joe Biden to clarify on the extent of Washington's commitment to defend the Philippines under their 1951 defence treaty due to growing regional tensions. The Philippines believes that the treaty needs to be adjusted due to the changes in the situation in the South China Sea, Taiwan, and North Korea.

On the same lines, President Biden reaffirmed the US's strong alliance with the Philippines and emphasized that any assault on Philippine forces or assets in the Pacific, including the South China Sea, would trigger US mutual defence commitments under the 1951 treaty. Negotiations also took place in advancing the U.S.-Philippines civil nuclear cooperation.



What does it mean?

The Philippines is a crucial ally for the US, which sees the country as a potential location for missiles and artillery systems to counter a Chinese invasion of Taiwan and aims to disperse its forces and gain influence among island nations in the southern Pacific. However, there are concerns that this approach could lead to a new Cold War-style division of the world into rival blocs. The summit aimed to rebuild the habits of alliance management back to levels of the 1970s and 1980s, alluding to the difficult period in bilateral relations under Marcos' predecessor, Rodrigo Duterte. It is important for countries like the Philippines to carefully weigh the potential risks and costs of relying too heavily on US support. They should also prioritize other areas of national defence, such as cybersecurity and intelligence, and focus on investing in climate adaptation and resilience measures.

Also in the news...

Regional Round-ups

East and Southeast Asia This Week

China: US has advanced spy tactics since 2011, says a report

On 4 May, a report released by China's National Computer Virus Emergency Response Centre (CVERC) and cybersecurity company 360, accuses the US of employing hackers to disrupt the functioning of governments, infrastructure, research institutions, and tech and oil companies since 2011. The report stresses that the CIA is secretly orchestrating "peaceful evolution" and "colour revolutions" around the world with the use of superior technology.

China: FM Qin Gang meets the chief of the Myanmar Junta to discuss diplomatic ties

On 2 May, Chinese foreign minister Qin Gang met with the Myanmar Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing. China has been a vital supplier to the Myanmar junta with arms and it refuses to condemn the Myanmar regime. Qin stating his support, said: "China stands with Myanmar on the international stage." Additionally, during the visit, the officials discussed cooperation and diplomatic relations between the two.

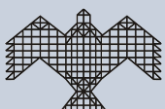
Japan: South Korean finance minister meets his Japanese counterpart for finance leaders meeting

On 2 May, South Korean finance minister Choo Kyung-ho met with his Japanese counterpart Shunichi Suzuki at their first bilateral finance leaders meeting. The meeting comes in for the first time in seven years, showcasing a sign of thawing of relations between the two countries. Suzuki said: "Japan and South Korea are important neighbours that must cooperate to address various challenges surrounding the global economy, as well as the regional and international community."

South Asia This Week

India: Defense Minister visits the Maldives

On 1 May, the Defence Minister of India arrived in the Maldives for a three-day official visit. He met with the President of Maldives and expressed India's commitment to the country. He handed over a Fast Patrol Vessel (FPV) and a Landing Craft Assault ship to the Maldives National Defence Forces. During the visit, he said: India has emerged as a leading defence exporter in recent years. A defence manufacturing ecosystem has been



created which has the advantage of abundant technical manpower. We produce world-class equipment to meet not only our own needs but also for exports. India offers an enhanced defence partnership to friendly foreign countries, that is accommodative of their national priorities and capacities.”

Bangladesh: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visits the US

On 1 May, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh visited the US to attend the 50-year partnership between Bangladesh and World Bank. She also met with the officials of the IMF and the US-Bangladesh Business Council. At the World Bank, she asked for assistance for Bangladesh’s transition to a developing country under the Delta Plan 2021. She also highlighted the trade partnership between the US and Bangladesh. She said that hi-tech parks and IT zones will be created in the country for American businesses to operationalise.

India: India-Russia suspend talks to settle trade in INR

On 1 May. Reuters quoted senior officials from the Government of India saying that Russia has still not warmed up to the idea of using the surplus rupee it will gather after trade in INR initiates. Reuters estimated that Russia does not desire INR surplus of up to USD 40 billion. The Indian side has suggested using the surplus in equities and bonds and did not clarify if the talks were suspended or halted for now. India’s export share in global trade is around 2 per cent, and USD remains desirable, while Russia had suggested trade with India is CNY.

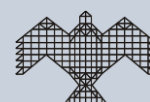
India: APSEZ sells Myanmar port at a discounted price of USD 30 million

On 4 May, Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Limited (APSEZ) announced the sale of its controversial port in Myanmar to an unknown buyer, Solar Energy at a big loss of USD 60 million. APSEZ, in its own independent evaluation, deemed the port as risky following sanctions on Myanmar by the US and a longer approval process, and not meeting certain condition precedents. APSEZ had paid USD 90 million for the land lease. In August 2019, a UN report indicated the role of foreign business in developments in Myanmar.

Africa This Week

Africa: Japanese prime minister visits Egypt, Ghana, Kenya and Mozambique

On 1 May, African news reported on Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida’s visit to Africa. He began his visit to Egypt. He will also be visiting Ghana, Kenya and Mozambique. In Egypt, Kishida held a meeting with Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah al-Sissi. During a press conference after the meeting between the leaders, Al Sissi said: “We reviewed the challenges the international arena is witnessing today, in particular the massive economic repercussions left by the Ukrainian crisis on developing countries that exceeded what the coronavirus pandemic caused in terms of a rise in inflation rates, energy and food prices, and expectations of a decline in the growth rate.” He added: “We discussed many regional issues of common concern, especially the Palestinian issue and the situation in Libya. Developments in Sudan occupied an important aspect of the talks.”



Europe and the Americas This Week

Russia: Two UAVs disabled by Russian air defences

On 3 May, Putin's office reported that two Ukrainian UAVs had been disabled by air defences that were headed to strike the president's Kremlin residence in Moscow in the early hours. Moscow described the drone strike as a "pre-planned terrorist act" and an attempt on Putin's life perpetrated by Kyiv. On 4 May, the Russian presidential spokesperson claimed that all of Kyiv's decisions are ultimately dictated by Washington, including which targets to hit and by what means, which makes the US also responsible for the attack on Kremlin/ Putin's life.

Italy: Declining birth rate and emptying classrooms

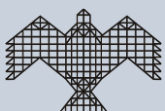
On 01 May, The Guardian reported on Italy's declining birth rate resulting in fewer children attending schools, leading to concern about the future of communities. Champorcher's infant school, which has been a vital part of the community for centuries, is now facing empty classrooms. According to Tuttoscuola, a news outlet specializing in education, infant schools in Italy have lost 30 per cent of pupils over the last decade. Government figures forecast 1.4 million fewer students aged between three and 18 by 2034, and the birth rate has been declining since the 2008 financial crisis. Factors contributing to the decline include difficulty in finding stable jobs, insufficient childcare support, and a decline in the number of women of reproductive age. Various financial incentives have been offered to encourage people to start a family, but they have failed to yield results. Immigration is a sore point for the government, and they are trying to come up with ways to counter shrinking class sizes and keep schools open for as long as possible.

Europe: Grain deal signed with eastern European countries to allow export of Ukraine grains

On 29 April, the European Commission announced the signing of the grain deal with eastern European countries for agricultural imports from Ukraine. Previously tensions arose due to Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Poland imposing restrictions to Ukraine's grain imports. According to the report, wheat, maize, rapeseed, and sunflower seeds would come under safeguard measures.

Europe: Eurostat predicts gradual population decline in the EU from 2026

On 02 May, Les Echos reported on Eurostat's prediction of a gradual decline in the population of the EU from 2026, particularly in Southern and Eastern countries like Italy, Portugal, Hungary, and Romania. Eurostat data shows that the EU population will reach its peak of 453.2 million in 2026, before a slow decrease to 447.9 million by 2050 due to an ageing population and a decline in the working population. While Ireland and Sweden are expected to see population growth, Germany will have a slight increase and southern and eastern European countries will experience a decline in their population. Italy will have a decline from 59 million inhabitants to 57.5 million by 2050 due to its high proportion of people over 65. The European demographic dynamics differ from the global trend, with Africa's population expected to almost triple in the 21st century. Demographer Laurent Toulemon warns of the sharp decline in the share of the European population in the world population.



The US: Contracts of Northrop Grumman and Raytheon on hypersonic defence extended

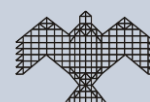
On 5 May, Defense Daily reported on the additional firm-fixed-price modifications awarded to the two defence producers. The modified contracts boosted the value of the companies' contracts by USD 29 million for Northrop Grumman (NOC) and USD 18 million for Raytheon Technologies (RTX). The Missile Defence Agency (MDA) extended the contracts to let companies continue refining the missile defence technology on Glide Phase Interceptor (GPI). GPI hypersonic missile would intercept the incoming hypersonic missile during the glide phase as traditional missile defence cannot scope the speed and manoeuvrability of high-speed and low-altitude hypersonic missiles. The value of the NOC and RTX contracts stands at USD 156 million and USD 153 million, respectively.

The US: Environmental groups sue FAA for allowing SpaceX to conduct a semi-successful rocket launch

On 1 May, a lawsuit was filed against the Federal Aviation Administration in federal court over SpaceX's launch of its massive Starship rocket last month. The objective of the launch was to demonstrate the most powerful rocket ever built and after demonstrating, the rocket exploded over the Gulf of Mexico. The environmentalist alleged that FAA authorized the launch "without complying with bedrock federal environmental law, without fully analysing the significant environmental and community impacts of the Space X launch program.

About the authors

Rashmi Ramesh and Akriti Sharma are PhD scholars in the School of Conflict and Security Studies at the National Institute of Advanced Studies. Padmashree Anandhan Anu Maria Joseph are Research Associates at NIAS. Femy Francis is a Research Assistant at NIAS. Rishika Yadav is a Research Intern. Teshu Singh is a Guest author.



About Global Politics:

The course provides an introduction to contemporary world affairs. The primary objective of the course is two – first, to enhance the understanding of contemporary global developments, with an attempt to comprehend the larger picture. Second, to identify trends leading forecasts on contemporary world affairs.

The Course will also invite senior scholars within and outside NIAS – also from within and outside India to provide lectures on contemporary world affairs.

The World This Week



6 February 2021

Biden's new US foreign policy priorities, Russia-EU tensions over Navalny, and China's redline on Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Taiwan



30 January 2021

The Daniel Pearl case in Pakistan and the new vaccine complications in Europe



23 January 2021

The US returns to the Paris Agreement, and India reengages the region through a Vaccine diplomacy



16 January 2021

North Korea's Party Congress, Houthis as terrorists, and Elections in Uganda



9 January 2021

Disorderly transition in the US, Breakthrough over Qatar, Enrichment in Iran and Arrests in Hong Kong



27 December 2020

The Year of COVID, Protests and Elections



20 December 2020

India-Bangladesh reset and China's Chang'e-5 success



13 December 2020

Morocco recognizes Israel, Maduro consolidates in Venezuela and No-deal Brexit gets real

About TWTW

The World This Week is an academic initiative of the Global Politics course at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore. The alert, published every Saturday aims to provide its readers with a ready reckoner of major developments during the week under three heads - what happened, what is the background and what does it mean. The Alert also provides an opportunity for the young scholars at NIAS and its partner institutions to follow and comment on contemporary global developments.

Editor: D. Suba Chandran

Assistant Editor: Avishka Ashok and Ankit Singh

