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RAJNATH CALLS FOR OPEN INDO-PACIFIC

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India's Foreign Policy evolution and changes

Maritime focus:Rajnath Singh addressing the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus via video conference.PTI

India hoped that the code of conduct for South China Sea (SCS), being negotiated between the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and China, would lead to outcomes in line with international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and did not prejudice the legitimate rights and interests of nations that were not party to these discussions, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Wednesday.

"Maritime security challenges are another area of concern to India. The sea lanes of communication are critical for peace, stability, prosperity and development of the Indo-Pacific region. In this regard, developments in the South China Sea have attracted attention in the region and beyond," he said at the 8th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Plus Meeting. "India supports freedom of navigation, over flight, and unimpeded commerce in these international waterways," he pointed out.

China and ASEAN have set a target of end-2021 to finalise the code of conduct but recently officials had said it may not be concluded by then. Mr. Singh reiterated India's call for a free, open and inclusive order in the Indo-Pacific, based upon respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations, peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue and adherence to international rules and laws. "Premised upon the centrality of ASEAN, India supports utilisation of ASEAN-led mechanisms as important platforms for implementation of our shared vision for the Indo-Pacific," Mr. Singh observed.

He expressed concern at cyberthreats like ransomware and cryptocurrency thefts and called for a multi-stakeholder approach, guided by democratic values.

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