

Russia-India partnership second to none: Envoy

Russia's partnership with India is "second to none" and cannot be compared with its relationship with Pakistan, Russian Ambassador Nikolay Kudashev said on Wednesday.

Asked about Russia's two-week military drill in October with Pakistan near the Russian town of Minralney Vody, he said there is no comparison between ties with India and Pakistan and that the purpose of the drills was counter-terror cooperation.

"Our partnership with India is second to none while we have a normal inter-state relationship with Pakistan," he said during a media briefing on the recently concluded tri-services exercise between Russia and India in Vladivostok. Russia favours "space" for all stakeholders in the region, the envoy said when asked about a possible quadrilateral involving India, Japan, the U.S. and Australia for deeper cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. There should "open cooperation" among all countries, he added.

Regional architecture

Mr. Kudashev underlined the need for a non-bloc regional architecture. Washington has been pressing for strengthening Indo-U.S. cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

Japan's Foreign Minister Taro Kono said recently that Tokyo favours a dialogue between Japan, the U.S., India and Australia to further boost strategic partnership.

Asked about China's indication that it may once again block the U.S., France and U.K.'s bid to list Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed chief and Pathankot terror attack mastermind Masood Azhar as a global terrorist, he evaded a direct reply. "We are members of the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation), where there is ample agenda to fight terrorism," he said.

The envoy also spoke about the tri-services exercise between India and Russia from October 19 to 29. More than 900 soldiers, sailors and air warriors participated in the exercise along with over 1,000 personnel from the Russian defence forces. A senior official said no decision has been taken on whether the tri-services exercise will be an annual feature.

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