

Navy steps up patrols in the Indian Ocean

While India is looking at cooperative frameworks to deal with common threats, Adm. Lanba clarified that efforts like coordinated patrols and joint patrols will be done only with maritime neighbours. "We only do coordinated patrols and joint patrols with nations who are our maritime neighbours. We are not looking at joint patrols with the U.S. Navy at this moment," he added.

Over the last year, the Navy, to test the waters, stepped up its presence and maintained round the clock surveillance on India's vital areas of interest across the length and breadth of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). This allows India to position itself as a net security provider in the region. "Earlier, there were flag showing missions in terms of overseas deployments for exercises and visits. The need of the hour is to change the nature of deployments. All choke points (meaning straits which connect seas or narrow water channels where ships and submarines of adversaries can be choked off) and sea lanes are now under 24/7 surveillance. They are now institutionalised deployments," a senior Navy officer said.

The new mission-based deployment concept, which was unveiled in the Naval Commander's Conference in May, has mission-ready ships and aircraft being deployed along critical sea lanes of communications and choke points from Malacca straits to the Persian Gulf. The biannual Naval Commander's Conference, which recently reviewed its effectiveness, has formalised it.

The cycle of 12-15 ships in effect means a turnaround of 36-45 ships, with one set deployed, one set in transit, and one set in maintenance.

"These ships are deployed always ready to meet any eventuality across the spectrum of operations ranging from acts of maritime terrorism and piracy to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) missions," the officer stated.

Adm. Arun Prakash said the new maritime strategy had listed "naval presence" as a mission. "This is, firstly, to reassure our friends that you are there, second to send a message to your adversaries and third, it is a measure of maritime domain awareness."

In this backdrop, he said Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea can be effectively monitored if India were to sit at the three choke points.

Another aspect is that India is positioning itself as the net security provider in the region and the first responder in the case of natural disasters.

For instance, in May, the Indian Navy was the first to respond to heavy rain and flooding in Sri Lanka as also to the requirements post Cyclone Mora in Bangladesh and Myanmar.

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