INDIA, U.S. TO SIGN ISA PACT

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - USA

For synergy:The Navies of India and the U.S. set up CENTRIXS systems at the Indian Navy headquarters.Special arrangement

The next 2+2 dialogue between India and the U.S. is likely to be held on December 18 in Washington, D.C., during which the two countries are expected to sign the Industrial Security Annex (ISA) and review the steps being taken to operationalise the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), official sources said.

But the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation (BECA), which is under discussion, is unlikely to be concluded. There are differences over the issue of reciprocity in the exchange of geo-spatial information and both sides are trying to resolve them, two official sources independently confirmed.

"The ISA draft is all done and ready. We are waiting for a formal occasion to sign it," one defence official said. The ISA is part of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), which India had signed with the U.S. many years ago. The ISA is crucial for U.S. companies bidding for big-ticket Indian deals to partner Indian private companies.

In the past two months, there were a series of high-level visits to take forward several bilateral initiatives. However, with the dialogue a month away, the final agenda is still being worked out. A major movement over the last year has been steps to operationalise the COMCASA, which will facilitate encrypted communications between the two armed forces.

Ellen Lord, U.S. Under Secretary of Defence for Acquisition and Sustainment, who was in India last month for the Defence Trade and Technology Initiative (DTTI) talks, said one significant thing coming out of the COMCASA was that "we have actually moved forward and in some cases actually put together some CENTRIXS [Combined Enterprise Regional Information Exchange System] kits." These kits facilitate encrypted communications between the navies.

She said that in March this year, the U.S. Navy and the Indian Navy signed a loan agreement and installed two Pacific fleet- provided CENTRIXS systems at the Indian Navy headquarters. "We are also holding discussions to have several more installed in a variety of places."

India has also created a common account of $5 million to pay for services or information sought from the U.S. under the COMCASA. In addition, a tactical data link, Sealink Advanced Analysis (S2A), is to be set up to analyse large volumes of data that are received as part of Maritime Domain Awareness.

"The account has been created. The S2A is being co-developed by India and the U.S. for big data analytics," an official source said.

During Ms. Lord's visit, the two sides identified new joint projects under the DTTI and signed a Statement of Intent (SOI) for their detailed planning and measurable progress. Ms. Lord had said that at the upcoming 2+2 dialogue, the two sides "will finalise a DTTI Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that will act as a guide for coordinating projects."

While there is progress in defence cooperation, a major issue is India's purchase of the S-400 missile system from Russia and the threat of U.S. sanctions under the Countering America's

Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). It is likely to figure prominently during the talks.

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