

## Indian and Philippine Navies Conduct Joint Patrol in South China Sea



In a significant display of deepening security cooperation, the Indian and Philippine navies have embarked on their first-ever joint patrol in the South China Sea. This landmark "Maritime Cooperative Activity" (MCA) is a tangible result of growing strategic alignment between New Delhi and Manila and is intended to enhance interoperability and maritime domain awareness. The patrol, which began on July 30, marks a new phase in bilateral defense relations, moving beyond routine port calls and exercises to a more robust, operational partnership.

The Indian Navy's Eastern Fleet, comprised of the guided-missile destroyer INS Mysore, the anti-submarine corvette INS Kiltan, and the replenishment vessel INS Shakti, arrived in Manila ahead of the patrol. According to Philippine Navy Captain John Alcos, the patrol is designed to "further strengthen the robust maritime relationship between the Philippine Navy and the Indian Navy." This sentiment highlights the strategic importance of the collaboration, which is a key component of India's "Act East" policy and the Philippines' ongoing efforts to modernize its military.

The joint patrol comes at a time of heightened regional tensions. The Philippines has been increasingly vocal about its territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea, and this cooperative activity with India sends a clear signal of support. The collaboration also follows a recent sale of India's indigenously developed BrahMos supersonic anti-ship cruise missiles to the Philippine Marine Corps, a move that significantly boosts the Philippines' coastal defense capabilities. This weapons deal underscores a broader trend of India becoming a key defense supplier to countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

This joint naval activity is part of a larger trend of countries partnering with the Philippines to maintain a "rules-based order" in the South China Sea. India is now joining other nations, including the United States, Australia, Japan, Canada, and France, in conducting maritime cooperative activities with Philippine forces. This growing coalition signals a shared interest in upholding international law, including the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling that largely invalidated China's expansive territorial claims. The joint patrol serves as both a practical exercise in naval cooperation and a strong diplomatic statement.

As the patrol concludes, both nations are expected to continue exploring further avenues for collaboration, including the potential for future exercises and defense technology sharing. The initial joint patrol marks a clear escalation in the military and diplomatic relationship between India and the Philippines, with long-term implications for the regional security architecture of the Indo-Pacific.