

## Indian Warships Embark on Strategic Drills in Southeast Asia



A flotilla of four Indian naval warships has embarked on an extended deployment to Southeast Asia, scheduled to conduct separate maritime exercises with Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines. This strategic engagement, reported on Monday, July 21, 2025, underscores India's deepening defense ties with these nations and its increasing focus on maritime security in the Indo-Pacific, particularly amidst ongoing territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

The naval task group includes INS Delhi (a Guided Missile Destroyer), INS Satpura (a Stealth Frigate), INS Shakti (a Fleet Tanker), and INS Kiltan (an Anti-Submarine Warfare Corvette). These vessels, representing some of the Indian Navy's indigenously designed frontline platforms, arrived in Singapore last week before proceeding to their next destinations. The deployment is expected to last approximately six weeks, with the warships engaging in a series of specialized drills and port calls.

The choice of Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines for these exercises is significant, as all three nations have overlapping claims with China in the hydrocarbon-rich South China Sea. Beijing's expansive territorial claims in the region and its refusal to acknowledge international rulings have led to heightened tensions, prompting these Southeast Asian nations to strengthen their defense capabilities and forge partnerships with other regional powers. The Indian warships will notably sail through the South China Sea to reach these countries, signaling India's commitment to freedom of navigation in international waters.

India maintains excellent bilateral ties with all three nations. With Vietnam, defense cooperation has expanded significantly, marked by India's gift of an operational warship, INS Kirpan, in

2023, and a "Joint Vision Statement on India-Vietnam Defence Partnership towards 2030." The two countries also have a logistics support pact, allowing their militaries to use each other's bases for repair and replenishment, and India has extended a \$300 million credit line to Vietnam for defense procurements.

Relations with the Philippines have also seen a boost, particularly with the sale of a land-based version of the BrahMos supersonic missile system last year. Furthermore, the Indian Navy's Survey Vessel Large (SVL) INS Sandhayak recently visited Port Klang, Malaysia, for hydrographic cooperation, reflecting ongoing efforts to exchange expertise and strengthen institutional ties in maritime surveying. India and the Philippines are also slated to hold their first joint bilateral maritime exercise, or Maritime Cooperative Activity (MCA), in early August.

These drills and port visits serve multiple purposes: enhancing interoperability between navies, sharing best practices, conducting professional exchanges, and reinforcing India's "Act East" policy and its broader vision for "Security and Growth for All in the Region" (SAGAR). By actively engaging with these key Southeast Asian partners, India aims to contribute to regional stability and a rules-based maritime order, strengthening its role as a responsible security provider in the Indo-Pacific.