

SCS row: India seeks peaceful resolution, says all parties must 'show utmost respect' for UN body

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India today sought peaceful solutions to the disputes in the South China Sea, asking all stakeholders to show "utmost respect" for the UN body as the safety of the shipping routes through these waters was crucial for stability in the region.

V.K. Singh

"The sea lanes of communication passing through the South China Sea are critical for peace, stability, prosperity and development," said Minister of State for External Affairs V.K. Singh while addressing the 5th East Asia Foreign Ministers Meeting in Vientiane, Laos.

"India believes that States should resolve disputes through peaceful means without threat or use of force and exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities that could complicate or escalate disputes," he said, without naming any country.

"India has noted the Award of the Arbitral Tribunal constituted under Annex VII of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea (UNCLOS) in the matter concerning the Philippines and China.

"As a State Party to UNCLOS, India urges all parties to show utmost respect for the UNCLOS, which establishes the international legal order of the seas and oceans," he told the 14th ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Vientiane, Laos, referring to the tribunal's July 12 rejection of Beijing's claim over the strategic waters.

"India supports freedom of navigation, over flight and unimpeded commerce, based on the principles of international law, as reflected notably in the UNCLOS," Singh said while pitching for resolving the dispute through peaceful means.

His remarks came a day after US National Security Advisor Susan Rice visited Beijing for the first time after the tribunal verdict and held extensive talks with top Chinese civil and military officials besides calling on President Xi Jinping, who said China has no intention to challenge the present international rules and order and will never seek hegemony.

Singh, in comments that also touched upon issues like terrorism and nuclear disarmament, identified maritime cooperation as a key priority in the current scenario.

"Maritime cooperation is today a key priority, especially following the adoption of the Statement on Enhancing Regional Maritime Cooperation at the tenth East Asia Summit," he said.

He also announced India's plans to host a second East Asia Summit (EAS) Maritime Conference in November this year following the success of the first such conference convened in the same month last year.

Singh called for deepening security cooperation based on an outright rejection of state-sponsored terrorism while de-linking religion from terrorism besides isolating those who harbour, support, finance or sponsor terrorists, without distinguishing between 'good' or 'bad' terrorists.

Buoyed by UNESCO's decision to list Nalanda University as a World Heritage site earlier this month, Singh also pitched for a concerted effort in developing the varsity as an EAS hub for excellence in education.

(With PTI inputs)