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Complexities & untapped potential of Indo-Pacific region demand concerted efforts for a prosperous, secure & inclusive future, says Raksha Mantri at 13th Indo-Pacific Armies Chiefs’ Conference in New Delhi

“India stands for a free, open, inclusive & rules-based Indo-Pacific”

“Our efforts to build robust military partnerships with friendly countries underscore our commitment to safeguard national interests & address global challenges”

Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh has called for collective wisdom and concerted efforts to deal with the complexities of the Indo-Pacific Region, while tapping its full potential, to ensure a future marked by prosperity, security & inclusivity, in consonance with the ancient Indian ethos of ‘*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*’ (*The World is One Family*) and the G-20 motto ‘*One Earth, One Family, One Future*’. This Raksha Mantri was delivering the inaugural address at the 13th Indo-Pacific Armies Chiefs’ Conference (IPACC) in New Delhi on September 26, 2023. Chief of Defence Staff, Chief of the Army Staff General Manoj Pande and Chiefs of Armies and delegates of 35 countries were present on the occasion.

Shri Rajnath Singh emphasised that the Indo-Pacific is no more a maritime construct, but a full-fledged geo-strategic construct, and the region is facing a complex web of security challenges, including boundary disputes & piracy. He explained his vision through a theoretical model by American author and speaker Mr Stephen R. Covey, which is based on two circles – ‘*Circle of Concern*’ and ‘*Circle of Influence*’.

The ‘*Circle of Concern*’ encompasses everything one cares about, including things which can be controlled and things which cannot. It includes a wide range of external factors & issues such as global events, economic conditions, other people's opinions, weather and many other aspects of life. The ‘*Circle of Influence*’ comprises things over which one has direct control or can exert some degree of influence. It may involve your attitudes, behaviours, decisions, relationships and actions.

Applying this model to the domain of international relations, the Raksha Mantri said: “There may be instances when the ‘*circles of concern*’ of different nations overlap with each other. International maritime trade routes passing through high seas, beyond the Exclusive Economic Zones of any country, are relevant examples. This can either result in conflict between nations or they can decide to coexist by

mutually deciding the rules of engagement. The concept of these circles underscores the importance of strategic thinking and prioritisation.”

Shri Rajnath Singh pointed out that states must recognise that global issues involve multiple stakeholders and no one country can address these challenges in isolation. He stressed the need to engage with the broader international community and work collaboratively through diplomacy, international organisations and treaties to tackle common concerns within the overlapping '*Circles of Concern*'. He termed the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), 1982 as a good example of such an international agreement that establishes the legal framework for maritime activities and addresses the issues arising from overlapping '*circles of concern*' of different nations.

The Raksha Mantri was of the view that states, at the same time, must identify and seek to expand their '*Circle of Influence*' to promote national interests on the global stage. This, he said, may involve building partnerships, participating in regional organisations and employing diplomatic, economic or military tools strategically. “This conference is an exercise where we all are trying to expand our '*Circles of Influence*' while harmonising the overlaps of our '*circles of concern*,’” he added.

Shri Rajnath Singh termed the IPACC, Indo-Pacific Armies Management Seminar (IPAMS) and Senior Enlisted Leaders Forum (SELF) as one of the largest brainstorming events of land forces in the region. These events provide a unique opportunity to build common perspectives towards a shared vision and build & strengthen partnerships in the spirit of collaborative security for all, he said.

The Raksha Mantri reiterated India's stand for a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific Region in the pursuit of shared security and prosperity. He defined 'Neighbourhood First' as the cornerstone of India's culture since time immemorial. India's approach to the region is defined by its 'Act East Policy', he said, reiterating Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's vision: “*Our engagement in the Indo-Pacific is based on five 'S': Sammaan (Respect); Samvad (Dialogue); Sahyog (Co-operation); Shanti (Peace) and Samridhi (Prosperity).*”

Shri Rajnath Singh added that India's efforts towards building robust military partnerships with friendly countries underscore its commitment to not only safeguard national interests, but also address global challenges faced by all. On climate change, one of the gravest global challenges, he stated that the Indian Armed Forces, with their unwavering dedication and professionalism, are the first responders in disaster situations and contribute to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) efforts.

The Raksha Mantri suggested that the three-day event discuss ways to enhance interoperability during the HADR operations. “Extreme weather events and natural disasters have become a new normal rather than being exceptions and are major challenges in our region. It is our responsibility that the climate change-related concerns of small island nations of the Indo-Pacific are given the importance that they deserve, as these bear the brunt of climate change as an existential crisis. Climate change also threatens their economic security. The economic impact of climate change and extreme weather create a demand for climate-resilient and eco-friendly infrastructure. There is a need to understand the compulsions and

perspectives of all our partner nations as well as sharing expertise and resources,” he said.

Shri Rajnath Singh added that while it is a difficult task to arrive at a consensus plan of action in a big grouping, however, with determination and empathy, it is not impossible. He referred to the recently concluded G-20 summit and stated that the group of countries adopted the New Delhi Leaders’ Declaration with consensus on all developmental and geo-political issues, making it historic and path-breaking.

The Indian Army and the United States Army are co-hosting 13th IPACC, 47th IPAMS and 9th SELF, a three-day conference of Chiefs of Armies and delegates of 35 countries in New Delhi from September 25th to 27th, 2023. The central theme for this forum is *‘Together for Peace: Sustaining Peace and Stability in the Indo-Pacific Region.’* The conference will provide an opportunity for Army Chiefs and senior-level leaders from land forces, primarily of the Indo-Pacific region, to exchange ideas and views on security and contemporary issues. The core effort of the forum will be to promote peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region through mutual understanding, dialogue and friendship amongst the littoral partners.

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