

Terrorism remains an evolving challenge, use of advanced tech necessitates collaborative & action-oriented approach, says Defence Secretary at 14th meeting of ADMM-Plus Experts Working Group on Counter-Terrorism

Calls for developing a 'whole of government and whole of society' approach to counter radicalisation & violent extremism and enhancing legal & financial frameworks to disrupt terror financing networks

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“India remains steadfast in its zero-tolerance policy towards terrorism and believes in an approach that combines robust domestic mechanisms, enhanced intelligence-sharing, and strong regional cooperation,” said Defence Secretary Shri Rajesh Kumar Singh during the keynote address at the 14th meeting of ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM) - Plus Experts Working Group (EWG) on Counter-Terrorism in New Delhi on March 19, 2025.

The Defence Secretary stated that terrorism remains a dynamic & evolving challenge, with threats increasingly transcending borders, and the use of advanced technology, cyber tools & unmanned systems by terrorist groups necessitates a cohesive, forward looking and action-oriented approach. He added that the Indo-Pacific region, given its geopolitical and economic significance, is particularly vulnerable to transitional terrorism and violent extremism, which calls for a comprehensive, adaptive, and deeply collaborative response.

Shri Rajesh Kumar Singh emphasised that, through the ADMM-Plus platform, India seeks to build synergy among the defence forces, security agencies, and policy frameworks to address emerging threat effectively. “In the complex, hyper-connected & fast-paced world, social and ecological systems are fragile. It is important to assess this risk to empower the Governments in priority setting and decision making. Terrorism can destabilise governments, undermine civil society, and threaten social & economic development. We have a collective obligation to provide the decision-makers guidance to understand uncertainty and better weigh the impact on decision making,” he said.

The event witnessed the handing over of ADMM-Plus EWG on Counter-Terrorism chairmanship to India and Malaysia from Russia and Myanmar for a three-year cycle. The Defence Secretary voiced the commitment of the new co-chairs towards ensuring that the efforts over this cycle yield practical and meaningful results. “By leveraging our collective expertise, enhancing capacity-building, and fostering deeper trust and cooperation, we can significantly strengthen regional security and counter-terrorism preparedness,” he said.

Shri Rajesh Kumar Singh stated that in the present cycle of EWG on Counter-Terrorism, the focus will be on strengthening regional cooperation and improving interoperability among the Armed Forces through structured joint initiatives. He added that the aim will be to counter the misuse of emerging technologies and addressing threats posed by terrorists through use of AI-driven propaganda, encrypted communications, drone

technologies. Strengthening cyber resilience against online radicalisation and recruitment efforts will also be a focus area, he said.

Towards the latter half of the cycle, the Defence Secretary said, work will be carried out together towards capacity building through practical exercises wherein Malaysia will conduct a Table-Top Exercise in 2026, facilitating strategic-level decision making simulations to improve Counter-Terrorism planning and preparedness. In 2027, India will host a Field Training Exercise, aimed at stimulating real-world Counter-Terrorism scenarios, enhancing operational coordination, and testing rapid response mechanisms. He called for developing a whole of government and whole of society approach to counter radicalisation & violent extremism and enhancing legal & financial frameworks to disrupt terror financing networks.

Shri Rajesh Kumar Singh congratulated Malaysia for assuming the chairmanship of ASEAN for the year 2025, extending India's full support. He acknowledged Malaysia's effort in effectively steering ASEAN under the current geopolitical scenario with the theme '*Inclusivity and Sustainability*'. He added that India is privileged to co-chair this crucial initiative alongside Malaysia, and appreciates the participation of representatives from the ASEAN member states, the Plus nations, the ASEAN Secretariat, and Timor-Leste. "Your presence reaffirms our shared commitment in combating terrorism in all its forms," he said.

The Defence Secretary termed India's relationship with ASEAN as a key pillar of its foreign policy, which is at the heart of Act East Policy. He reiterated India's strong support to a stable and unified ASEAN which serves as an institutional anchor of an important region.

Delegations from 10 ASEAN members (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Vietnam, Singapore and Thailand) and eight dialogue partners (Australia, New Zealand, RoK, Japan, China, USA and Russia) along with Timor Leste and ASEAN Secretariat are participating in the meeting. India is co-chairing the EWG on Counter-Terrorism for the first time.

VK/Savvy

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