

Singapore, China to boost defence cooperation, engage in larger military exercises

SINGAPORE: Singapore and China have agreed on an updated defence agreement that could see them increase the scale of existing military exercises, with new areas of cooperation between troops.

The revised Agreement on Defence Exchanges and Security Cooperation (ADESC) is expected to be signed later this year, Singapore's Defence Ministry (MINDEF) said in a media release on Wednesday (May 29).

This comes as Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen formally met his Chinese counterpart General Wei Fenghe on Wednesday, ahead of the latter's attendance at the upcoming Shangri-La Dialogue. This is the first time since 2011 a Chinese defence minister will be at the Shangri-La Dialogue.

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"During the meeting, both ministers agreed on a substantial programme to deepen defence ties and step up bilateral engagements on various fronts," MINDEF said.

"Both ministers discussed regional security and practical ways in which the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus could build confidence among militaries and avoid conflict."

The ministers also welcomed the conduct of exercise cooperation involving both armies this year, and agreed for both navies to hold exercise maritime cooperation in 2020.

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Another proposed exchange under the enhanced ADESC is the stepping up of high-level dialogues as well as academic and think-tank exchanges.

When asked about the significance of the proposed agreement given the climate of US-China tensions, Dr Ng said it wasn't meant to be a "bellwether of anything".

"We've always said we want good relations with all countries and what we're doing with China is no different from what we previously do," he said in an interview after the meeting.

"If anything, it reflects the bilateral confidence in each other and a willingness to deepen defence ties particularly because we have shared perspectives for a stable and inclusive region, especially for security matters."

The ADESC was first signed in 2008, when defence ministries from both countries reaffirmed their close friendship and desire to strengthen defence exchanges and security cooperation.

During his visit at the MINDEF building in Bukit Gombak, Gen Wei was welcomed by a Guard of Honour before signing a guestbook and shaking hands with Dr Ng in front of cameras.

As part of his introductory visit, Gen Wei will call on Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat. He will also be hosted to dinner by Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for National Security Teo Chee Hean.

Dr Ng also invited the People's Liberation Army Air Force Ba Yi aerobatics team to participate at the Singapore Airshow 2020.

"Gen Wei's visit underscores the long-standing, warm and friendly bilateral defence relations between Singapore and China, which have deepened and grown over the years," MINDEF said.

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