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Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement: USA

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Why in News

The USA is looking forward to India signing the **Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-Spatial cooperation (BECA)**, at the next **India-USA 2+2 ministerial dialogue** likely to be held in October, 2020.

Key Points

- **2+2 talks:**
 - They are a **dialogue between two appointed ministers from each country**. This meeting aims to discuss issues of strategic and security interests between the two countries.
 - Defense and foreign ministers or secretaries meet with their counterparts from another country.
 - India **holds such talks with Japan and Australia**, at the foreign secretary and defense secretary level.
 - India **holds ministerial-level talks only with the USA**. Apart from India, the United States holds such ministerial dialogues with Australia and Japan also.
 - The talks were announced in June 2017. The 2+2 dialogue has replaced the Strategic and Commercial Dialogue between the foreign and commerce ministers of the two countries that were held previously.

- **BECA:**

- BECA will allow India to use the **geospatial maps of the USA** to get pinpoint military accuracy of automated hardware systems and weapons such as cruise and ballistic missiles.
- BECA is an important precursor to India **acquiring armed unmanned aerial vehicles such as the Predator-B** from the USA. Predator-B uses spatial data for accurate strikes on enemy targets.
- BECA is **one of the four foundational military communication agreements** between the two countries. The other three being GSOMIA, LEMOA, CISMOA.
- Initially, India had reservations to **geospatial mapping on the grounds of national security**, but they were later addressed by mutual dialogue and discussion between the two countries.

General Security Of Military Information Agreement

- GSOMIA allows **militaries to share the intelligence** gathered by them.
- Signed by India in 2002.
- An extension to the GSOMIA, the **Industrial Security Annex (ISA)**, was signed at the 2+2 dialogue in 2019.
- ISA provides a framework for exchange and protection of classified military information **between the USA and Indian defence industries.**

Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement

- LEMOA allows both countries to **have access to each other's designated military facilities** for refueling and replenishment.
- Signed by India in 2016.

Communications and Information Security Memorandum of Agreement

- COMCASA (Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement) is the India specific version of CISMOA.
- Valid for 10 years, COMCASA aims to provide a legal framework for the **transfer of highly sensitive communication security equipment from the USA to India** that will streamline and facilitate interoperability between their armed forces.
- Signed by India in 2018.

Other Maritime Developments Between India and the USA

- A **maritime information agreement** is also under active deliberation between India and the USA. Once concluded, India will have such arrangements with all Quad countries.

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) is the informal strategic dialogue between India, USA, Japan and Australia with a shared objective to ensure and support a **free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.**

- In increasing military to military interactions, the USA has also posted a liaison officer at the Navy's **Information Fusion Centre for Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)** meant to promote **Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)**.
 - The Information Fusion Centre serves countries that have **White Shipping Information Exchange** (White-shipping refers to commercial shipping information about the movement of cargo ships) agreements with India.
 - **MDA** is defined by the **International Maritime Organization** as the effective understanding of anything associated with the maritime domain that could impact the security, safety, economy, or environment of a country.
- Recently, India posted a liaison officer at the USA Navy Central Command in Bahrain.

Way Forward

- Signing BECA is crucial for India in order to neutralise the Russia-China-Pakistan axis in the maritime domain and for the stability of the Indo-Pacific region. The acquisition of aerial platforms like the USA naval helicopters and multi-role fighters is a key priority for India in the current scenario of increasing **Indo-China conflict**.
- The increase in India's maritime interactions with the Quad countries centred around information sharing for improved MDA in the Indian Ocean Region and **Indo-Pacific** will strengthen India's position internationally.
- **Strategic hedging** is the key to move forward in relationships with powerful countries like the USA. India and the USA must now strive to complete the unfinished agreements and set the course for a **Comprehensive Strategic Global Partnership**.

Source: TH