

《Navy and ASEAN take part in drill》

Joint 11-day exercise aimed at boosting regional security at sea and combating terrorism

The PLA Navy joined countries from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in a maritime exercise on Monday, signaling a further step in recent frequent exchanges with the regional bloc.

The missile destroyer Lanzhou from the PLA's South Sea Fleet, carrying a Z9C helicopter and a special operations unit, arrived in Brunei on Sunday for the joint drill under the ASEAN+8 defense ministers' meeting.

The 10+8 mechanism refers to the 10-member ASEAN and eight of its partners - China, Russia, the United States, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia, New Zealand and India.

This is the first marine security and anti-terror joint drill staged under the mechanism.

Aimed at boosting maritime security and combating terrorism, the drill is scheduled to end on May 12 in Singapore, according to Defense Ministry spokesman Wu Qian.

The destroyer left Sanya, Hainan province, on Thursday and conducted a number of exercises en route.

PLA Daily said it took only seven days to prepare the destroyer for the drill. Members of the helicopter group and special operations group, who come from six units, joined the warship on the day it left.

Zhu Zhengzhong, the vessel's captain, said, "Several years ago, we spent one or two months to prepare, but now it takes one week at most."

He said frequent maritime missions, such as joint drills and anti-piracy tours in the Gulf of Aden, have made the crew confident about such operations.

Senior Colonel Lai Minghe, political commissar of the Mission Command Post on the destroyer, said the drill will increase member countries' sharing of maritime information and complete the process of maritime security cooperation.

"The attendance of the Lanzhou reflects China's initiative in regional security cooperation," Lai said.

The exercise comes as Beijing seeks to broaden mutual understanding and communication with ASEAN countries.

A ruling by an international arbitration body in a process launched unilaterally by the Philippines challenging China's territorial sovereignty in the South China Sea is expected within weeks.

China has said repeatedly it will neither accept nor take part in the process.

During a Southeast Asian tour by Foreign Minister Wang Yi late last month, Brunei, Cambodia and Laos agreed with China that disputes over some of the Nansha Islands and reefs are not an issue between China and ASEAN and should not affect these relations.

