

China sees red as India-Japan-US Malabar naval exercise kicks off today

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With tensions heightening between India and China amid the border stand-off and Beijing looking its presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), the Malabar exercise involving warships, submarines, aircraft personnel from India, Japan and the US is all set to kick off in the Bay of Bengal from today.

The power game comes at a time when Indian and Chinese troops are locked in a tense face-off near the Sikkim-Bhutan-Tibet tri-junction since mid-June. The Indian Navy has also recorded an "unusual surge" in the number of Chinese warships and submarines entering the IOR over the last two months.

While China's government last week played down its concerns over the tri-nation naval exercise, the State media in Beijing have hit out at the largest-ever drills as a threat to China's "security concerns" and economic interests in the Indian ocean region.

On Friday, the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued a measured reaction to the drills, saying it has 'no objection to normal bilateral relations and cooperation among relevant countries' but 'hope[s] this kind of relations and cooperation is not directed at any third party and conducive to regional peace and stability.'

Malabar 2017 is the latest in a continuing series of exercises that has grown in scope and complexity over the years to address the variety of shared threats to maritime security in the Indo-Asia Pacific, a US embassy statement said.

The exercise will feature both ashore and at-sea training.

While ashore in Chennai, training will include subject matter expert and professional exchanges on carrier strike group operations, maritime patrol and reconnaissance operations, surface and anti-submarine warfare, medical operations, damage control, explosive ordnance disposal (EOD), helicopter operations, and visit, board, search and seizure (VBSS) operations.

The at-sea portions will be conducted in the Bay of Bengal and are designed to advance participating nations' military-to-military coordination and capacity to plan and execute tactical operations in a multinational environment.

Events planned during the at-sea portions include liaison officer professional exchanges and embarks; a photo exercise; submarine familiarization; high-value unit defence; air defence exercises; medical evacuation drills; surface warfare exercises; communications exercises; search and rescue exercises; helicopter cross-deck evolutions; underway replenishments; gunnery exercises; VBSS exercises; and anti-submarine warfare, the release said.

Participants from the US Navy include the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Nimitz (CVN 68) with embarked Carrier Air Wing 11; the guided-missile cruiser USS Princeton (CG 59); guided-missile destroyers USS Howard (DDG 83), USS Shoup (DDG 86), and USS Kidd (DDG 100); a P-8A Poseidon aircraft; and a Los Angeles-class fast-attack submarine.

Indian, Japanese and US maritime forces have a common understanding and knowledge of a shared working environment at sea. Each iteration of this exercise helps to advance the level of understanding between our Sailors, and we hope to be able to continue this process over time. As members of Indo-Asia-Pacific nations, our maritime forces are natural partners, and we look forward to continuing to strengthen our bonds and personal relationships, it said.

The Japan Maritime Self Defense Force ships JS Izumo (DDH 183) and JS Sazanami (DD113) will be participating in the exercise.

While the Malabar series of exercise was originally a bilateral one involving the Indian and the US navies, the NDA government in 2015 decided to include Japan as a permanent member in the annual war drill of the maritime forces.

India's only aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya will join the 10-day Malabar exercises for the first time and the U.S. is fielding its USS Nimitz aircraft carrier while Japan is bringing its largest helicopter carrier JS Izumo.

China is extremely wary that such a security construct will seek to "contain" it, and had lodged a strong protest against the Malabar exercise in 2007, which saw India, the US, Japan, Australia and Singapore come together for war-games in the Bay of Bengal.

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