

U.S. AND INDIA CALL FOR MORE JOINT AIR EXERCISES

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Joining hands:Fighters of the IAF and the U.S. Air Force at Kalaikunda during 'Cope India 2018'.Special Arrangement

As 'Cope India 2018' — the 12-day joint exercise between the U.S. and Indian Air Force being held at the Kalaikunda air station in West Bengal's Paschim Medinipur district — draws to a close, officials of both countries called for such joint exercises to be held more frequently.

More than 100 personnel of the U.S. Air Force, along with 400 personnel of the Indian Air Force, are participating in the exercise that will conclude on December 14. The exercise follows the Joint International Air Drill of Pakistan and China, which began at the Shaheen VII airbase in Pakistan earlier this month.

Huge Indian fleet

The U.S. Air Force has sent a dozen F-15 whereas the IAF is participating with a fleet of 10 Sukhoi 30, six Jaguars and four Mirage 2000. Along with the Kalaikunda Air Station, the exercise is being conducted from the adjoining Air Station Arjan Singh (located at Panagarh).

Speaking to journalists on Monday, Cope India 2018 director, Air Commodore J.S. Mann, said that mutual understanding of operational air power and the best practices learnt from each other during the joint exercise would help the countries "operate together in the times to come".

Lt. Col. Daryl Insley, who is heading the U.S. forces, said that his only regret was that the forces could train only for two weeks.

"We need to train on a regular basis more often, and not after five to 10 years," he said during an interaction.

The joint air exercise between the two air forces is being held after 13 years. The last time too it was held at the Kalaikunda Air Station in 2005. Commanding officer of the Kalaikunda Air Station, Air Commodore Shaji Antony, also emphasised on the need of more such exercises and said, "We learn from each other during such exercises."

War games conducted

The collaborative and cooperative exercise over the past eight days involved formation of teams, comprising pilots and aircraft of both the air forces, participating in war games over the air space of Kalaikunda.

Officials of the IAF said that the air station was ideal for holding such exercises not only because it is one of the largest air stations in the region but also because as it has a large reserve air space of hundreds of square kilometres.

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