

NAVY CHIEFS OF QUAD IN JAPAN AHEAD OF MALABAR EXERCISE

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Showing strength in sea: Navy chief Admiral R. Hari Kumar meeting with his counterparts of Australia, Japan and the U.S. just before the commencement of of Ex Malabar in Japan. Special Arrangement AP

The Navy chiefs of India, Australia, Japan and the U.S., which comprise the Quadrilateral (Quad) grouping, met in Japan on Saturday and exchanged views on “further enhancing interoperability” in future editions of the Malabar multilateral naval exercise. Meanwhile, a Chinese research vessel, *Yuan Wang-6*, has entered the Indian Ocean via the Sunda Strait.

The meeting in Tokyo comes ahead of a series of multilateral engagements in the next couple of weeks to be hosted by Japan. This year marks 30 years of the Malabar Exercise, which began as a bilateral exercise between India and the U.S. in 1992.

While the course of the Chinese vessel is not known, official sources said the Indian Navy is keeping a close tab on its movements. This comes just three months after a major diplomatic showdown between India and Sri Lanka over the docking of a similar vessel from China at the Hambantota Port in the island nation in August.

Earlier in the day, the Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS), Admiral R. Hari Kumar, arrived in Japan on an official visit from November 5 to 9, where he will witness the International Fleet Review (IFR) conducted by the Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force at Yokosuka on November 6 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of its formation, the Indian Navy said in a statement.

“During the visit, as one of the Observer Navies in the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS), the CNS will attend the 18th WPNS on November 7-8 at Yokohama, being hosted by Japan, as the current Chair of WPNS,” the Navy stated.

Further, Admiral Kumar will also attend the inauguration of the Malabar Exercise being held at Yokosuka, and interact with his counterparts and other heads of delegations from close to 30 countries participating in the IFR, WPNS and the Malabar Exercise, according to the Navy.

Indian naval ships *Shivalik* and *Kamorta* arrived at Yokosuka on November 2 to participate in the IFR and the Malabar Exercise. “The presence of these indigenously built ships of the Indian Navy at these multi-national events will be an opportunity to showcase the shipbuilding capabilities of Indian shipyards during a large international gathering,” the Navy added.

Chinese research vessel

The timing of the entry of *Yuan Wang-6* coincides with a planned long-range missile test by India next week. According to the open source intelligence handle on Twitter @detresfa, India has issued a NOTAM (Notice to Airmen), for a no-fly zone over the Bay of Bengal between November 10 and 11 for a maximum distance of 2,200 km. Given the range, the test is likely to be related to an Agni series of Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile.

According to the maritime vessel tracking portal marinetraffic.com, *Yuan Wang-6* departed from Jiangyin in China on October 21, and as on the morning of November 4, was located near

Indonesia and heading in the southwest direction. While research activities are allowed in international waters as per international regulations, the data generated has a dual nature, including military, and many times, the motive of Chinese vessels seems doubtful, Defence officials have said.

Just a few days ago, the Japanese Defence Ministry said that a Chinese survey vessel had entered Japan's territorial waters in the early hours of November 2. This, according to an article in *The Diplomat* by Takahashi Kosuke with the *Janes Defence Weekly*, was the fourth time that a People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) vessel had intruded into Japan's waters this year, a record high.

In the past, Chinese naval vessels had been observed in the vicinity while the Malabar Exercise was under way. As reported by *The Hindu* earlier, there has been a steady rise in the deployment of Chinese research vessels in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), and the general area of deployment observed to be around the ninety-degree east ridge and southwest Indian ridge. Research or survey vessels have powerful equipment for snooping and gathering a range of data.

Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean began in 2008 under the garb of anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden.

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