

INDIA, RUSSIA TO HOLD NAVAL DRILLS IN ANDAMAN SEA

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Russia

Amid high operational alert by the Indian Navy in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) due to the ongoing stand-off with China in Ladakh, India and Russia are scheduled to hold the bilateral naval exercise, *Indra 2020*, in the Andaman Sea, close to the strategic Strait of Malacca later this week.

“Three Russian Navy ships will take part in the exercise on September 4 and 5 along with an equal number from the Indian Navy, along with some aircraft,” a defence source said.

This is also the first bilateral naval exercise since all such engagements were suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The timing of the exercise coincides with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh’s visit to Russia for the Shanghai Cooperation organisation (SCO) Defence Ministers meet. It also comes just after India withdrew from the Kavkaz-2020 multinational exercise in Russia that is scheduled for later this month.

While the stated reason for the withdrawal was the COVID-19 pandemic, defence sources had said that it was due to the participation of Chinese troops.

“So instead of exercising with Chinese troops in Kavkaz 2020, we would exercise with Russian Navy near the mouth of Malacca,” another source observed.

Exercise with U.S.

In July, frontline warships of the Indian Navy conducted a Passage Exercise (PASSEX) with the U.S. aircraft carrier *USS Nimitz* strike group in the same area near the Andaman and Nicobar (A&N) islands as it was transiting the Indian Ocean.

USS Nimitz was returning from the South China Sea through the Malacca Strait where it undertook freedom of navigation operations.

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