



## Australia to Join Malabar Exercise

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### Why in News

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Recently, **Australia has agreed to join the Malabar Exercise** on India's request. The exercise is scheduled to be held in November 2020.

### Malabar Exercise

- It is an **annual trilateral naval exercise** between the navies of **India, Japan, and the USA** which is held **alternately in the Indian and Pacific Oceans**.
- It began as a **bilateral naval exercise** between India and the USA in 1992 and was expanded into a trilateral format with the **inclusion of Japan in 2015**.
- The Exercise is **aimed to support free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific** and remain committed to a **rules based international order**.
- It is **also aimed at interoperability** with an emphasis on humanitarian assistance, surface war manoeuvres, anti-submarines warfare, counter-terror operations, gunnery training and aerial surveillance.

### Key Points

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- **2020 Malabar Exercise:**
  - The 2020 Exercise is expected to be held in the **Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea**. In 2019, the exercise was conducted off the coast of Japan.
  - Due to **Covid-19 pandemic** the exercise had been planned in a '**non-contact - at sea**' format.
  - **Its objective** is to enhance safety and security in the maritime domain.

- **Australia's Inclusion:**

- The issue of Australia's inclusion in Malabar had again come up for discussion at the **Quad** foreign ministers meet in Tokyo held in October 2020. Thereafter, India invited Australia to join the Exercise.

**Quad** is the informal strategic dialogue between India, the USA, Japan and Australia with a shared objective to ensure and support a **free, open and prosperous" Indo-Pacific region.**

- The move will bolster the ability of India, Australia, Japan and the United States to work together to **uphold peace and stability across the Indo-Pacific region.**
- It is also expected to further lay the foundations for the eventual **formalisation of the Quad grouping.**

- **Background:**

- Despite regular requests from Australia, India resisted issuing the invitation due to its concerns that the move would give the appearance of a **'quadrilateral military alliance'** aimed at China.
  - In 2017, Australia had requested for observer status in the Malabar Exercise.
  - China has repeatedly expressed strong opposition to any expansion of the Malabar Exercise, which it sees as a multilateral naval construct designed to "counter and contain" it.
- However, the recent **India-China tensions** over the situation at the **Line of Actual Control** (LAC) may have brought more flexibility to India's decision making process.
- **Japan and the U.S.A also have been pressing India** for Australia's inclusion in Malabar Exercise.

- **Other Cooperation Between Quad Members:**

- India and Japan had signed a **military logistics agreement** in September, 2020.
- India has signed maritime information sharing agreements for **Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)** with Australia and Japan and a similar agreement is under discussion with the U.S.A.

**MDA** is defined by the **International Maritime Organization** as the effective understanding of anything associated with the maritime domain that could impact the security, safety, economy, or environment of a country.

- India and U.S.A. are also stepping up efforts to conclude the **Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA)** ahead of the **Indo-US 2+2 ministerial meeting** on 26-27 October, 2020.
  - BECA, a key military pact, will allow India to use U.S.A.'s geospatial intelligence and enhance accuracy of automated systems and weapons like missiles and armed drones.
  - BECA is one of the **four foundational military communication agreements** between the two countries. The other three being **GSOMIA, LEMOA, CISMOA**.
    - **GSOMIA:** General Security Of Military Information Agreement
    - **LEMOA:** Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement
    - **CISMOA:** Communications and Information Security Memorandum of Agreement
  - Defence and Foreign ministers of the two countries will Participate at the 2+2 ministerial meeting.

## **Way Forward**

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- As India seeks to increase cooperation with other countries in the maritime security domain, high-end military exercises like Malabar are key to enhancing maritime capabilities, building interoperability with its close partners, and demonstrating its collective resolve to support an open and prosperous Indo-Pacific.
- The fast-tracking of work on BECA and the decision of the four Quad countries to participate in the Malabar Exercise are perceived to be a strategic signal to an aggressive China.

**Source: TH**