Malabar Exercise 2017

Why in news?

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Malabar 2017, which began on July 10, is being held in the Bay of Bengal.

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What is Malabar?

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- Malabar is an **annual military exercise** between the navies of India, Japan and the U.S. held alternately in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.
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- It is a platform to **improve interoperability between the navies.**
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- It began in 1992 as a bilateral exercise between India and the U.S.
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- Then it got permanently expanded into a trilateral format with the inclusion of Japan in 2015.
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- The 10-day games will have two phases, an initial harbour phase in Chennai and a sea phase later which will be held across the Bay of Bengal and the northern Indian Ocean.
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- In a first this year, all three countries fielded carriers (India - INS Vikramaditya) for the exercises.
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- This year is also witnessing the largest participation to date with 16 ships, 2 submarines and over 95 aircraft taking part from the three countries.
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Why it is important?

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- These naval interactions have provided the Indian Navy **invaluable insights**

into the tactics, doctrines, warfare techniques and best practices of the US Navy.
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- In the realm of maritime warfare, the three navies could **derive mutual benefit** from their diverse operational expertise.
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- With China’s growing military strength and its increasing presence in the Indian Ocean, the Malabar has assumed greater importance.
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- Given China’s intent in acquiring bases in the Indian Ocean, and frequent transit of PLA naval units through our waters, cooperation in maritime domain awareness deserve top priority.
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- Equally, amphibious operations, trade-warfare, maritime interception operations, anti-access concepts and, of course, disaster relief, must receive due importance.
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- There is special focus on **anti-submarine warfare operations** in the backdrop of increasing submarine forays by the Chinese Navy.
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Why is China concerned?

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- China always viewed Malabar with paranoid suspicion that India is colluding with the US in an attempt at **“containment”.**
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- Its fears have been aggravated with Japan being included and Australia keen to join as well.
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- China had issued a statement to New Delhi **questioning the intent behind the war games,** which forced India to abandon the expansion.
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- Australia has been keen to join the games on a permanent basis, which has so far not fructified due to India’s reluctance.
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What could be done?

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- For 25 years, Indo-US naval cooperation has formed the sheet-anchor of bilateral relations, ignoring all the political and diplomatic tensions.
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- With the invaluable accession of Japan to this partnership, the India-Japan-US triad must be **elevated to strategic status.**
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- A **"maritime-infrastructure and economic initiative"** must be created that reaches out to smaller Indian Ocean nations in an initiative to sway them away from the Chinese.
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Source: The Hindu & The Indian Express

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