

India, Japan, U.S. plan joint air exercise

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India, Japan and the U.S. are set to elevate the bilateral 'Cope India' air exercise to a trilateral format. The three countries already conduct naval war games under the expanded Malabar naval exercise.

The U.S. had proposed a trilateral air exercise between India, Japan and the U.S. For this, the Cope India exercise will be elevated to a trilateral level in phases, two official sources independently confirmed on condition of anonymity.

The next edition is scheduled to be held in December for which the Final Planning Conference to finalise the modalities of the exercise is scheduled next week in Kalaikunda [West Bengal], a defence official said.

"To begin with, it will be a small-level exercise involving transport aircraft in the trilateral format. It will be scaled up in subsequent editions," the defence official added.

Japan to send observers

At the annual Defence Ministerial Meeting in August between Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and her Japanese counterpart Itsunori Onodera, it was agreed that Japan will send observers for the next round of Cope India exercises between India and U.S. to be hosted by the Indian Air Force.

The level of interoperability in the exercises, both bilateral and trilateral, is expected to go up with India recently signing the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement with the U.S..