

In a first, India to deploy tri-services for int'l drill

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New Delhi: India will dispatch around 350 soldiers, a multi-role stealth frigate, an anti-submarine warfare corvette and some aircraft for the major "Indra" combat exercise to be held with Russia at Vladivostok from October 19 to 29.

This will be the first time India will deploy manpower and assets from the Army, Navy and Air Force together for a tri-service exercise with a country.

The aim is to crank up military-to-military ties with Russia, which has been India's largest defence supplier since the early-1960s but without the armed forces of the two countries exercising much together.

In sharp contrast, India holds several exercises with the United States every year, ranging from the top-notch naval Malabar wargames (with Japan as a regular participant now) to the counter-terror Vajra Prahar & Yudh Abhyas between their armies.

After the massive Malabar exercise in the Bay of

File photo



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Bengal in July, for instance, the Indian and American armies will now hold the Yudh Abhyas exercise at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in the US from September 14 to 27.

The US, incidentally, has also bagged Indian arms contracts worth \$15 billion since 2007, even overtaking Russia in annual sales over the last four years.

But in a strong comeback for Russia during the Modi-Putin summit in Goa in October 2016, India inked pacts to acquire five S-400 Triumf advanced air defence missile systems, four Grigorivich-class frigates and

200 Kamov-226T light helicopters, while also sealing the lease of a second nuclear-powered submarine after INS Chakra, all together worth around \$10.5 billion, as was then reported by TOI.

Officials say the basic thrust of Indra exercise will be on tri-service operations in an integrated theatre scenario, with establishment and functioning of joint command structures and headquarters.

"The two armed forces will also learn each other's doctrines, tactics, techniques and procedures for joint operations. The final planning conference for the exercise will be held in mid-September," said an official.

The exercise comes at a time when India is also contemplating far-reaching defence reforms to usher in some much-needed synergy among the three services, ranging from the creation of a tri-service chief or permanent chairman of the chiefs of staff committee to integrated theatre commands in the years ahead.