

China reacts sharply to Japan joining India-US naval drills

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Beijing: Reacting sharply to arch rival Japan joining the 'Malabar' naval exercises being held by the Indian and US navies in the Bay of Bengal, China today said it is not "that fragile" to be affected by the trilateral drills.

"You mentioned India is having naval exercises with US and Japan and you ask whether China is concerned. I think you are thinking too much," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Hua Chunying shot back when asked for China's reaction to the exercises which are due to start today in the Bay of Bengal.

"Everyday a lot of activities take place around the world. We cannot connect every activity with China," she said.

"We are not that fragile and we are having sound relationship with both India and the US. We hope that relevant activities will contribute to the regional stability they will contribute more positive energy for that," she said.

Japan's participation in the Malabar exercises came in for sharp criticism in Chinese official media in recent months.

An article in the official Global Times took umbrage over India's move to include Japan in the Malabar exercises saying that India-Japan defence cooperation is "dangerous for Asia".

"There has been a clear trajectory of Japan and India deepening their defence ties in recent years and the relations are bound to be promoted since India will include Japan in the Malabar naval exercises with the US in October. The two countries are also exploring the possibility of air exercises," the article published in August this year said.

The Malabar exercises have been held by India and the US since 1992.

This year's exercises assumed significance over India's move to invite Japan, much to the chagrin of China, which views Japan as a strategic rival in the Asia Pacific region.

A multi-nation Malabar exercise in 2007 involving Japan, Singapore and Australia besides India and Japan also drew diplomatic objections from China.

This year's invitation to Japan to take part in the Malabar exercises comes in the backdrop of India's concerns over China's increasing presence in the Indian Ocean with its submarines docking in Colombo and Karachi.

The US too is concerned over China's assertive role in the South China Sea as Beijing braces for Washington's strategic 'pivot to Asia' in the region.

Coincidentally, the Indian and Chinese armies also began their 10-day 'Hand-in-Hand' anti-terrorism exercises in China's Kunming city today.

- PTI