

India, Saudi Arabia begin first naval exercise

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A frontline Indian warship is currently participating in the first naval exercise with Saudi Arabia, reflecting the growing defence ties between the two sides in the wake of the Indian Army chief's first visit to the West Asian country last year.

Key Highlights

- INS Kochi, the flagship destroyer of the Indian Western Naval Fleet, arrived at Port Al-Jubail recently for the "Al-Mohed Al-Hindi 2021" exercise. The warship sailed to Saudi Arabia after conducting the "Zayed Talwar" drill with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) off the coast of Abu Dhabi.
- India's defence and military ties with Saudi Arabia received a major boost with Indian Army chief Gen MM Naravane's visit to Riyadh – the first such trip by an Indian service chief – last December. Naravane had also visited the UAE on the same tour.
- The Al-Mohed Al-Hindi exercise began with the harbour phase recently, and the Indian embassy said the drill "heralds a new chapter in the bilateral defence ties". INS Kochi was welcomed at the port by officials of the Royal Saudi Naval Forces, Border Guards and the Indian embassy.
- Planning by India and Saudi Arabia for their first naval exercise had begun in 2019 but the move was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Indian Navy held a few minor exercises amid the pandemic but plans for larger drills were recently revived.
- Warships from India, Australia, Japan and the US – the four members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quad – will participate in the Malabar exercise in the

Western Pacific later this month.

SOURCE: *Hindustan Times*