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Iran, Russia Start Joint Naval Drill in Indian Ocean

By AFP

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The Iranian army said the exercises will "expand bilateral relations" with Russia. **Kremlin.ru**

Iran's armed forces on Tuesday launched a joint naval drill with Russia in the north of the Indian Ocean designed to "enhance security" of maritime trade, state television reported.

The "Maritime Security Belt Exercise" is to cover an area of 17,000 square kilometers and include units from the Iranian army and the elite Revolutionary Guards as well as Russia's Navy, the broadcaster quoted drill spokesman Rear Admiral Gholamreza Tahani as saying.

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"The purposes of this drill are to enhance security of international maritime trade, confront maritime piracy and terrorism, and exchange information," he added.

Russia's Baltic Fleet said in a statement on Monday that three ships will take part in the drill.

Exercises will include "liberating a commercial ship abducted by pirates," and fighting fires, it said.

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> Iranian and Russian militaries have kicked off a joint naval drill in the Indian Ocean dubbed "#Iran-#Russia Maritime Security Belt 2021," with both Artesh and #IRGC participating. Second such exercise since 2019. 1/2 pic.twitter.com/UrM9LKFCNf
>
> — Jason Brodsky (@JasonMBrodsky) February 16, 2021

According to Tahani, the Indian navy will also join the exercise, in a message of "peace and friendship for neighboring and regional countries."

Iran's state news agency IRNA said the drill is to last three days.

The Iranian army said the exercises will also "expand bilateral relations" with Russia.

Iran, China and Russia held a similar drill in the area in 2019, and the Islamic republic participated in "Caucus 2020" drills held in Russia last September.

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