EU, India commit to free, open & inclusive Indo-Pacific

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The EU and India conducted a joint naval exercise in the Gulf of Aden on June 18-19 in a bid to boost their readiness for an anti-piracy operation in the region.

The exercise involved Indian Navy frigate INS Trikand, EU NAVFOR Somalia - Operation Atalanta assets, including Italian frigate Carabiniere (Atalanta’s flagship) and Spanish frigate Navarra, French frigate Surcouf and French amphibious assault helicopter carrier Tonnerre.

According to India's Ministry of Defence, the exercise included cross-deck helicopter landings, complex tactical evolutions at sea, live firing, a night-time joint patrol and a naval parade in the high seas off the coast of Somalia, which has seen cases of piracy in the past.

The ministry said the EU and India are committed to a free, open, inclusive and rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region, underpinned by respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, democracy, rule of law, transparency, freedom of navigation and overflight, unimpeded lawful commerce, and peaceful resolution of disputes.

"They reaffirm the primacy of international law, including the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)," the defence ministry said.

The EU and India had launched a dialogue on maritime security in January 2021 and agreed to deepen their dialogue and cooperation in this domain.

The Indian Navy's role in the region has included providing escort to World Food Programme chartered vessels, coordinated by EU NAVFOR Somalia - Operation Atalanta.

The Indian Navy has previously participated in the Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) conference, co-hosted by Operation Atalanta, whose assets conducted several joint exercises with Indian vessels in the past, the defence ministry said.

The ministry added that the EU and India intend to strengthen their operational cooperation at sea, including joint naval exercises and port calls, and to protect the sea-lanes of communication.

They also intend to boost maritime domain awareness in the Indo-Pacific through mutual coordination and exchanges. "The EU and India reaffirm their interest to enhance their cooperation in the field of maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region," the ministry said in a press release. (INN)