

India - Japan Cooperation: RSTV- Big Picture

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What's in the news?

- The Indian and Japanese warships conducted exercises in the Indian Ocean. The Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force described these manoeuvres as designed to “promote mutual understanding”.
- It consisted of four warships, two from each country. The Indian navy training vessels INS Rana and INS Kulush were joined by the Japanese navy’s JS Kashima and JS Shimayuki.
- Naval exercises are now routine between India and Japan, but the timing of the present exercise will be connected with the military stand-off between India and China in Ladakh.
- The Japanese embassy in New Delhi said this was the 15th such exercise in three years as the Japanese navy has become one of the principal partners of the Indian Navy.
- Indian naval ships take part in the exercise, both bilaterally with their Japanese counterparts and as part of the [Malabar Exercises](#), which also includes the United States.

India - Japan Relations: Historical Background

- In 1998, when India had conducted its nuclear tests, Japan had considered sanctions against India. These involved suspending fresh grants-in-aid and shelving a plan to host a World Bank forum of donor nations on India.
- However, the relationship has transformed totally in the last 20 years, especially on the security front.
- Both share a common outlook on the security front in the Indo-Pacific region. Both countries have difficulties with China, which has tried to intimidate Japan and has been trying to do the same with India.
- Both joined the US and Philippines in South China’s sea naval exercises.
- Japan, in 2015, became a permanent member of the Malabar Exercise along with the United States and India. These countries jointly conduct Mil to Mil exercises, Coast Guard exercise and Air Force exercise.
 - Mil to Mil relations consist of military training and liaison exchanges, joint exercises and senior-level consultations.
- Both are members of the UN, G4 and are looking for permanent membership at the UNSC.

The relevance of the recent naval exercises

- An indication of how like-minded countries can work together.
- Both are being threatened by China’s rising influence in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean.

What is the level of cooperation and understanding between Japan and India on the maritime front?

- These are Asia's two economic giants. They can help each other as they face common security threats from China.
- The protection of the International Sea Lines (ISL) has become a necessity for India and Japan to secure its shipments.
- They have been conducting joint anti-piracy operations as per the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP).
- Both nations have been exchanging views about the developments in the Korean Peninsula and the South China Sea and the overall security situation in the Indo-Pacific.

- Japan has to be more deeply involved with Malabar - for better data and information exchange between the warships of India and Japan, the anti-submarine warfare and maritime patrol aircraft.

Is the Indo-Japan relation presently in a safe space?

- The relationship has evolved cordially. Between 2014 and 2019, many diplomatic activities have taken place. PM Modi's visits to Japan in 2014, 2016 and 2018 were very constructive. It resulted in the establishment of a "Special Strategic Global Partnership" and an "Agreement for Cooperation in Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy".
- Japan is the third-largest investor in India and companies from both nations are collaborating. Japan is helping India make railroads, in healthcare, in automobiles, telecommunications and digitalization.
- The common strategic issue for both is the presence of China in the South China Sea, the Pacific Ocean and now the Indian Ocean. Both are required to understand and counter China's moves.
- China's claims around the Nine dash line have led to its clashes with Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia, Philippines and Taiwan. So, India and Japan have a lesson to learn as far as these security-related relations are concerned.
- India and the US have been organising naval exercises and Japan has joined them since 2015. It's best if many like-minded countries like Australia, Japan, India come up together against the revisionist attitude of China.

Will the Quad be taken to the next level? Will many countries come together against China's aggression?

- China, with its assertive stance, has been picking up fights with many other countries, whether it is Australia, Japan, India or the ASEAN Countries. It has laid untenable claims by using its muscle power.
- Now, the middle powers along with the US have decided to confront China's expansionism.
 - For instance, collective decisions like banning Huawei and ZTE will have more impact on China.
- Despite the strong economic ties between China and Australia, the latter has now acknowledged China's aggression because national integrity and security are non-negotiable.
- Enhancing maritime domain awareness, sharing of logistics for power projection and joint development of defence technology among the Quad nations are other obvious areas of priority.
 - The Quad could also create an Indo-Pacific critical infrastructure fund as a viable alternative to China's [BRI](#).
 - What coerces India to endorse the Quad as a strategic proposition is its own maritime interests which are being threatened by the rising Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean Region.

How concerned is China about its Malacca dilemma?

- China has been developing oil pipelines for fuel import through alternate routes like from Gwadar to China and from Myanmar to China. The intention is to reduce its dependence on the **Straits of Malacca**, which can get choked very easily, either by India, the US or Japan.
- No matter how many pipelines China lays through the land, till about 2053, more than 50% of its oil will still be traversing through the Indian Ocean region. This makes it rather strategically vulnerable.
- In the post COVID world order, the middle powers will gain prominence. According to the Australian Prime minister, the presence of the US and China is not mandatory anymore for a strong Indo-Pacific political unity.
- The Quad dialogue recently involved Vietnam, New Zealand and South Korea. It may in the future also involve Indonesia and even France, which is a formidable maritime power.
- The tactical alliance between these countries adds to the vulnerability of China which has overplayed its hands already.

- In the event of a conflict, the Malacca Strait could easily be blocked by a rival nation, cutting off China from crucial energy resources.

What are the other areas of cooperation between the two to make this relationship even more strong?

- Trade between India and Japan is not as robust as the trade volume India shares with the US and China.
- There is already strong Japanese investment in automobiles and pharmaceutical sectors in India.
 - More avenues where Japan can help India have to be discovered, whether defence or multimedia.
- Japan's support would be decisive for India's membership in international forums such as G7 and a permanent place in the UNSC.
- The nature of trade flows between India and Japan and its impact on global supply chains is very critical.
 - Also, the involvement of other countries like Australia and Singapore can enable an Asian power transient which would have the potential to restrain China.
- A stronger complementarity of interests between the two countries has to be worked out. This has to begin with reducing all dependence on China.

Are there any areas of concern in the bilateral relationship that needs to be addressed?

- India's pulling out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership ([RCEP](#)) due to the fear of the uncompetitiveness of Indian exports and large trade deficit, has caused disappointment to Japan.
- In the high-tech sector, the IT sector and in terms of defense platforms, India and Japan can and should collaborate further, which will be in common mutual interest.
- Technology sharing has been another area of concern. In the past, Japan has repeatedly refused India's request for selling the sophisticated Soryu-class submarine for India's advanced submarine program, Project 75 (I).
- Japan is hesitant with regards to its defense equation due to severe opposition from people within Japan that it should not become too active on the defense front. However, recently the defence budget has shot up and Japan's National Security Council has cancelled the deployment of two costly land-based US missile defence systems. Instead, Japan now is planning to acquire pre-emptive strike capability. This shows a changing attitude in the post COVID world order.

