India-Japan Ties in Indo-Pacific

GS Paper II: *International Relations*

Why in News?

Following Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's visit to India, New Delhi and Tokyo unveiled a pathbreaking Economic Partnership Framework alongside a pact to co-develop military hardware.

What is the significance of the recent visit?

- **10 Years of FOIP -** This engagement marks the 10th anniversary of the ***Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision***, a concept fundamentally rooted in India-Japan collaboration.
- **Hardware Pact -** Moving beyond mere joint military exercises, the visit delivered a formal pact to co-develop military hardware together.
- **Relaxed Export Restrictions -** The visit capitalizes on Japan's historic domestic policy shift allowing the export of critical defense systems to 17 allied countries.
- Thus, it directly positioning India as a primary beneficiary of niche Japanese defense technology.
- **Economic Partnership Framework -** The two nations unveiled a new framework focusing heavily on supply chain resilience for critical materials, energy, and the creation of economic infrastructure.

What are the core drivers of Japan's regional outreach?

- **The 'Washington Recession' Paradox -** A perceived contraction or uncertainty in the United States' long-term security commitments in Asia has forced Tokyo to pivot toward regional multi-alignment and strategic hedging.
- **Countering Chinese Revisionism -** Beijing's intensifying economic coercion and assertive maritime activities across the South China Sea and the Sea of Japan pose direct threats to Tokyo's territorial and trade security.

- **The Legacy of Leadership -** India holds the foundational position in Japan's maritime vision.
- The "Indo-Pacific" concept was first birthed by PM Shinzo Abe before the Indian Parliament in 2007, and updated via PM Kishida's "New Plan for FOIP" in New Delhi in 2023.

What role does economic security play?

- **Key Pillars**
  - **Pillar 1: Energy Liquidity & Stockpiling** – Focusing on stabilizing energy supplies through financial aid initiatives, building resource stockpiles, and creating emergency fallback reserves.
  - **Pillar 2: Critical Infrastructure for AI & Data** – Building secure, resilient economic infrastructure with advanced technologies, ensuring the safe flow of data, and strengthening supply chains for critical components like semiconductors.
  - **Pillar 3: Mineral Alliances & Mutual Swaps** – Securing steady access to critical minerals by forming strategic partnerships.
  - It also establishes mutual-swap or joint-stockpiling agreements for vital raw materials with allied nations.
- **The POWERR Asia Initiative -** To mitigate West Asian energy vulnerabilities, Japan extended $10 billion in financial aid under the ***Partnership on Wide Energy and Resource Resilience (POWERR)*** to Southeast Asia.
- Alongside releasing 50 days' worth of domestic oil reserves to stabilize regional supply chains.
- **Critical Mineral Monopolies Countermeasures -** Tokyo signed critical mineral supply chain deals with Australia and finalized joint stockpiling, crude oil, and LNG mutual-swap mechanisms with South Korea.

How is Japan expanding defence cooperation?

- **Financial & Hardware Diplomacy -** Tokyo scaled its Official Security Assistance (OSA), its dedicated military aid framework, by a massive 125% to $116 million, expanding recipient nations from 8 to 12.
- **High-Value Defense Contracts -** Japan solidified a $7-billion agreement with Australia to deliver 11 advanced *Mogami-class frigates*.
- Meanwhile, rapidly scaling up maritime search-and-rescue drills and capability-building with the Philippines, Indonesia, and South Korea.
- **Multilateral Security Institutionalization -** Deploying mini-laterals to enhance inter-operability and crisis response like the

- *3rd Japan-Pacific Defence Dialogue* (involving 14 Pacific nations) and
- the inaugural *Japan-New Zealand-Australia Defence Ministers' Meeting.*

What domestic changes complement Japan's regional strategy?

- **Unprecedented Fiscal Expansion-** Japan passed its largest-ever defense budget of 122.3 trillion yen, rapidly approaching the milestone target of 2% of its National GDP.
- **Dismantling Export Restrictions -** Japan relaxed its stringent post-war arms export controls, explicitly legalizing the sale and co-development of critical defense systems with 17 allied nations, positioning India as a primary beneficiary.
- **Intelligence & Cyber Upgrades-** Deep structural overhauls are underway within Japan's cyber-defense command and intelligence-sharing protocols to match Western standards.

What is the Strategic Blueprint for India-Japan Ties?

Strategic Domain	India's Deliverable / Gain	Japan's Deliverable / Gain
Defense Technology	Access to niche Japanese military hardware, stealth tech, and co-development opportunities.	Market diversification; establishing a reliable security anchor in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
Supply Chain Resilience	Institutionalizing the SCRI (Supply Chain Resilience Initiative); alternative manufacturing hub.	De-risking critical industries and semiconductor inputs away from Chinese dependency.
Digital & AI Infrastructure	Deep talent pool of software engineers and data scientists.	Export of physical high-tech infrastructure, supercomputing elements, and capital.

What is the way forward?

- The evolution of Japan into a "proactive contributor to peace" provides India with its most dependable, technologically sophisticated partner in Asia.
- Transition quickly from signing frameworks to actual field manufacturing of military hardware under the relaxed export guidelines.
- It seamlessly merges India's connectivity projects with Japanese capital to offer transparent, viable infrastructure alternatives to China's Belt and

Road Initiative (BRI) across East Africa, South Asia, and the Pacific Islands.
- By balancing defensive deterrence with robust economic inter-dependence, the India-Japan axis will remain the defining element for stability in the twenty-first-century Indo-Pacific.

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Reference

The Indian Express | Japan expanding its role in Indo-Pacific

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