GEOPOLITICS

# THE INDIA JAPAN 2+2 IN TOKYO: TEST RANGES, WARSHIPS AND TRUST

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Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar reached Tokyo on Wednesday, 18 November, for the fourth India Japan 2+2 dialogue of foreign and defence ministers. They meet Japan's Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi and Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi today, Thursday. Jaishankar is also holding the 19th India-Japan Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue with Motegi, according to ANI. The last 2+2 was held in New Delhi in August 2024.

The Ministry of Defence said the visit "aims to further deepen bilateral defence ties and chart the roadmap for enhanced operational and industrial synergy between the two countries." The agenda includes defence technology, maritime security and larger joint exercises. When I filed this, no joint statement had been released, so this piece is about what is on the table and what I will be looking for.

The meeting falls on the same day that US President Donald Trump meets Chinese President Xi Jinping in Shenzhen, as Deccan Herald noted. I wrote last week about what Bharat should watch in Shenzhen. Two of Asia's largest democracies will be talking about warships and missile ranges.

## The groundwork laid in Delhi and Yokosuka

This is the third meeting between Singh and Koizumi this year. They met in New Delhi in August and in Cebu in October, on the margins of the ADMM-Plus. In Delhi on 20 August they signed a Memorandum of Arrangement on Maritime Security Cooperation. Japan's Ministry of Defense published the joint statement. It covers sharing maritime domain awareness, search and rescue, and disaster relief, along with the use of ports and of maintenance and repair facilities.

In that statement the two ministers agreed to work on mine countermeasures and to "explore the possibility of joint development in naval shipbuilding and design by leveraging Japan's technological expertise and India's production capabilities". They also agreed to discuss Japan's use of India's production capabilities under "Make in India", and a ship repair arrangement "in near future". They called the UNICORN shipborne antenna system "the first defence equipment transfer project between the two countries". It combines several antennas in one mast. Japan Air Self-Defence Force fighters were to visit India for the first time for the exercise Veer Guardian 26.

On Wednesday Singh and Koizumi went to Yokosuka and inspected JS Natori, a Mogami-class stealth frigate of the Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force. Japan's Ministry of Defence said the visit would advance "concrete maritime security cooperation", according to The Pioneer. The same day Singh told the Indian community in Tokyo that domestic defence production had reached a record Rs 1.80 lakh crore, up from Rs 48,000 crore a decade ago, and that exports had grown from Rs 600 crore to Rs 38,000 crore.

## Japan's request for Indian test ranges

The newest item is Japan's interest in Indian firing ranges. On 27 October the chief of Japan's Ground Self-Defence Force, General Masayoshi Arai, confirmed that personnel had gone to India. "We had dispatched personnel to coordinate various matters with India," he said, as WION reported from The Japan Times. Japan is looking for places to train with its Type-25 anti-ship missile, which has a reported range of about 1,000 km, and with small attack drones.

Deccan Herald explained the reason. Japan's limited land and sea area makes it hard to find large, safe training zones for long-range missiles without risk to civilian air and sea traffic. The paper also recalled that India first agreed in 2019 to give a foreign country access to its testing infrastructure, when it exchanged a Letter of Intent with Singapore on the Integrated Test Range at Chandipur. No arrangement with Japan has been announced.

I think India should say yes, on clear terms. A range is sovereign Indian territory. We set the dates, the safety rules and what data is shared. Hosting a partner's missile training in that way makes us the place where Indo-Pacific allies come to train, and that is a good position to be in.

China will not like it. Deccan Herald pointed out that Beijing has territorial disputes with both countries: with India along the boundary and with Japan over the Senkaku Islands. For that reason I would handle any arrangement calmly and openly, and explain it to our own public too.

## Jaishankar's message to Japan

At the inauguration of Raisina Tokyo on Wednesday, Jaishankar spoke plainly to Japanese business and policymakers. "It is essential to update the picture of India and not be stuck in the past," he said, according to The Week. He named semiconductors, critical minerals and clean energy among the areas to build on, and said security is "best ensured through self-reliance and trusted partnerships".

He also described a harsher world. "Whether it is resources or energy, market access or technology, or indeed even finance, every aspect of global economic activity has been more and more openly weaponised by relevant players," he said, as reported by Deccan Herald. "The era of rules, norms and assumptions is unfortunately rapidly eroding."

I read the Tokyo visit through that lens. India needs partners who bring technology and capital and who do not dictate terms. Japan has both. In August Singh welcomed Japan's recent review of its rules on transferring defence equipment and technology, and I think that review makes Tokyo readier to share. In return Japan needs shipyards, space to train, and a partner on the Indian Ocean side of the Strait of Malacca. Two days after the Quad summit in Manila, the bilateral track looks more practical than the four-nation one.

## What to watch in the joint statement

I will look for three things when the joint statement comes out. First, any language on Japanese use of Indian test ranges, even as a study. Second, a timeline for the UNICORN antenna. In August the ministers only committed to its "early realization". Third, whether the ship repair arrangement promised in August is finally signed, so that Japanese warships can be repaired in Indian yards. That would mean paid work for our shipyards.

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