GEOPOLITICS

JAPAN WILL TRAIN AT INDIAN FIRING RANGES. WHAT THE TOKYO 2+2 SETTLED

By **Kamlesh Bhagatkar**, *Politician, Author & Geopolitical Analyst · 20 November 2026*

The fourth India Japan 2+2 dialogue ended in Tokyo on Thursday, 19 November, with one decision I had hoped for. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar sat down with Japan's Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi and Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi, and the joint statement welcomed the signing of a Letter of Intent "towards the utilisation of firing ranges in India" by Japanese forces. According to the statement, as reported by ANI, this would let the Japan Self-Defence Forces conduct live-fire training in India for the first time, including training with surface-to-ship missiles.

Business Standard reported that the drills will begin next year and will use ranges such as the Integrated Test Range at Chandipur. Koizumi called it a "major step strategically". The ministers agreed to speed up coordination between the two defence establishments for "early realisation" of the arrangement, which tells me the details are still being written.

Yesterday I wrote about what was on the table in Tokyo and argued that India should say yes to Japan's request for range access, on our terms. The terms come next.

What else the joint statement says

The defence industry section has two items with dates attached. The ministers looked forward to closer cooperation under the framework of "Design with Japan, Make in India", and welcomed the third India Japan Defence Industries Forum, held in Tokyo in October. They also said they expect early arrangements on UNICORN, the Japanese shipborne antenna system, and India's Acceptance of Necessity by February 2027. The second half of that is a deadline for New Delhi, not Tokyo.

At sea, the two sides welcomed the Memorandum of Arrangement on Maritime Security Cooperation signed in August. They agreed to move quickly to concrete results between the Indian Navy and the Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force in maritime and air domain awareness, search and rescue, information sharing and disaster relief. The statement repeats the earlier pledge to work on mine

countermeasures and to explore "joint development in naval ship building and design". Rajnath Singh told reporters the two countries had agreed to accelerate cooperation in "niche underwater and missile technologies", PTI reported.

On exercises, the ministers want more complex drills, the use of unmanned systems, and bilateral and multilateral drills at short notice. They noted the first visit to India by Japan Air Self-Defence Force fighters for the exercise Veer Guardian 26, and the first trilateral naval passage exercise of India, Japan and Indonesia in February 2026. India will host the fifth Coast Guard Global Summit, a forum the Japan Coast Guard started, in February 2027. Defencestar reported that the two governments will also renew their memorandum on cybersecurity and hold the next Cyber Dialogue soon.

Economic coercion, without names

The line that will be read most closely in Beijing is about trade. The ministers reiterated their "grave concerns regarding economic coercion", including arbitrary export restrictions and "non-market policies and practices that result in overcapacity", which they said disrupt supply chains in critical industries. PTI noted that the statement named no country, though few readers in Asia will need a name.

Jaishankar was direct at the press conference. "We also spoke about a growing tendency to weaponise connectivity, resources, services, supply chains and market shares," he said, adding that many of these have direct implications for national security. "Strengthening resilience and exploring new options must be seen in that context." The two sides listed semiconductors, critical minerals, information and communication technology, clean energy and pharmaceuticals as sectors for project-based cooperation.

For Indian readers this is not abstract. On Monday I wrote about China's new licence rule for tunnel boring machines, an export control that matters for our tunnel projects. A shared list of sectors with Japan is one practical answer to that kind of pressure, if it produces factories and contracts.

Jaishankar also spoke about shipping lanes, with the attacks on merchant ships around the Strait of Hormuz in the background. "Ensuring that maritime trade, which is at the heart of international commerce, functions smoothly is imperative. Our maritime cooperation can help make a difference," he said, as Deccan Herald reported.

What it means for Bharat

I read three gains here. First, the ranges. When Japan's forces fire missiles at Chandipur, they do so on Indian soil, under Indian safety rules and on Indian dates. India becomes a place where a major Indo-Pacific military trains, and that gives us standing with Tokyo that no communique can.

Second, the defence industry. "Design with Japan, Make in India" is the right formula for us, because Japan has the shipbuilding and electronics depth and we have the yards, the workforce and the demand. The UNICORN deadline of February 2027 will show whether the formula works in practice.

Third, the economic security language. India has been saying for years that supply chains can be turned into weapons. Having Japan say the same thing in a joint statement, on the same day that US President Donald Trump met Chinese President Xi Jinping in Shenzhen, tells the region where both of us stand. Jaishankar put the aim as "a multi-polar Asia and a multi-polar world". I agree with that framing. I do not think either Delhi or Tokyo wants to be a junior partner in someone else's bargain.

What to watch next

I will be following the range arrangement itself: which ranges, which weapons, and what data India keeps. The UNICORN Acceptance of Necessity is due by February 2027. I also want to see whether the five named sectors turn into announced projects with money behind them, since the statement only commits the two sides to "project-based" work. Early 2027 will show how much of Thursday's statement has been carried out.

Sources

- Business Standard: Japan to use Indian test firing ranges from next yr as defence ties deepen
- Asianet Newsable (ANI): India and Japan Deepen Strategic Defence Ties at Tokyo 2+2 Meeting
- Millennium Post (PTI): India, Japan flag 'economic coercion'
- Deccan Herald: 'Exploring options is crucial': EAM Jaishankar flags growing 'weaponisation' of resources, supply chains at India-Japan talks
- Defencestar: India-Japan 2+2 Dialogue Sets Ambitious Agenda For Defence Industrial And Maritime Cooperation



Kamlesh Bhagatkar

Politician, author and geopolitical analyst from Nagpur. Author of *RSS: 100 Years of Selfless Service* (2025); his next book, *Nineteen Days*, tells the story of Pahalgam and Operation Sindoor.

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