

India, Japan converge in Southeast Asia

Posted at: 22/11/2023

Context:

Upon dropping a series of Chinese-led infrastructure projects due to sustainability and geopolitical concerns, the Philippines is now redirecting its attention to Japan and India as alternative sources of development and security.

India and Philippines strategic ties:

1. Manila now shows the desire to deepen and broaden its security and economic partnerships with like minded partners amidst Beijing's growing unwillingness to act and behave like a responsible neighbour.
2. Under the leadership of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., Philippines has been steadfast in securing its sovereignty and sovereign rights in the West Philippine Sea against China's revisionist interests in the Indo-Pacific (IP) Region.
3. Accordingly, Manila's attribution of both Tokyo and New Delhi as important partners allows all three democracies to explore new opportunities for multifaceted strategic cooperation.
4. Bilateral partnership between the Philippines and India has witnessed noteworthy advancements as Manila is now more willingly incorporating New Delhi in its strategic calculations.
5. The recent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Philippine and Indian Coast Guards will allow both sides to improve their interoperability, intelligence sharing, and maritime domain awareness. India has also offered to supply the Philippine Coast Guard with seven indigenously manufactured helicopters based on a soft loan agreement with extended payment terms. This comes at the heels of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile delivery to the Southeast Asian country later this year.
6. Thus, Japan and India's bolstered engagements in Southeast Asia complement the interest of resident countries like the Philippines to lessen their susceptibility to China's expanding economic clout and deepening power projection capabilities.
7. Forging robust ties with friendly regional powers is crucial to Southeast Asian countries' hedging strategies, especially as the U.S.-China competition continues to intensify.
8. As per the State of Southeast Asian Survey of 2023, Japan and India are the top two choices of Southeast Asian countries for alternative Indo-Pacific strategic partners. Therefore, the contemporary structural conditions serve as an opportunity for Japan and India to operationalise their shared vision for the IndoPacific.

India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership:

1. It is best defined through the robust ties they share. In terms of security, New Delhi and Tokyo constantly engage in varied platforms ranging from regular bilateral military exercises and 2+2 meetings to multilateral frameworks such as the Quad and the G20.
2. Both countries share similar threat perceptions – an increasingly assertive and disruptive China. Beyond defence cooperation, New Delhi and Tokyo have also embarked on a third

country cooperation model in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC): an example of third country cooperation model:

1. In 2017, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his former counterpart Shinzo Abe welcomed collaborative efforts in establishing industrial growth and development networks across Asia and Africa, creating the AAGC.
2. While the project eventually slowed down due to geopolitical turbulence and the economic constraints posed by the COVID19 pandemic, both countries have recently explored new third country cooperation models throughout the region.
3. Among them are the emerging trilateral partnerships between India, Japan, and Bangladesh and a similar framework between India, Japan, and Sri Lanka.

Conclusion:

As India is significantly deepening and broadening its ties with Southeast Asian countries, such as the Philippines, New Delhi should consider taking its third country developmental model with Tokyo into the subregion of the greater IndoPacific at a time when resident countries are looking for alternative sources of development and security amidst the polarising dynamics of the U.S.China power competition.



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