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## Kishida's visit to India: Eye on the Indo-Pacific

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Source: CNBC



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Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida made his second visit to India on March 20 for the bilateral summit meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.<sup>1</sup> This year holds great significance for bilateral relations between the two nations, as India holds the G20 presidency and Japan holds the G7 presidency. India and Japan also completed 70 years of their friendship ties in 2022 and deliberated on delving deeper into their 'Special Strategic and Global Partnership.' As it was PM Modi's turn to visit Japan, this visit by the Japanese PM was quite unexpected. This visit is seen by many as covering up for Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa's absence from the G20 Foreign Ministers meeting.

Kishida and Modi widely discussed issues revolving around the Ukraine crisis and the scope for collaboration between India's G20 presidency and Japan's G7 presidency. Both leaders also agreed on the importance of the 'Global South' in this process. Japan is also aiming to focus on the rule of law as the fundamental agenda in the G7 summit this year, which is also premised on Russia's invasion of Ukraine. PM Kishida invited PM Modi to the G7 meeting to be held in May. Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese also visited India before Kishida's visit to comprehend India's trajectory in its ties with Australia. Kishida's visit also shows that he wishes to see how Japan can fit in between India-Australia ties to further the vision of the Indo-Pacific and the Quad.

### **Boosting Economic Ties**

Since the economic partnership between India and Japan has been the main pillar ever since their ties got a boost, the two leaders have emphasised strengthening and enhancing it. Both nations signed an agreement with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) worth ¥300 billion for the Mumbai-Ahmedabad high-speed rail. The progress on this project has been scrutinised<sup>2</sup>. Trade, too, has increased manifold between the two nations, from US \$15.7 billion in 2017-18 to US \$20.5 billion in 2021-22.<sup>3</sup> The two leaders also discussed cooperation in areas of the digital economy and supply chain concerns. Last year, in 2022, when PM Kishida visited India, he set a target for Japanese investment of ¥5 trillion in India over the next five years. The two leaders also aimed to focus on food security, as Russian invasion of Ukraine impacted food access everywhere.

### **Indo-Pacific Strategy**

Japan also wishes to work towards integrating northeast India with southeast Asia under its vision of a 'free and open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP). Japan has invested tremendously via its Overseas Development Assistance in infrastructure development to enable further connectivity, which looks beyond northeast India to include Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh. Japan also aims to promote the

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'Bay of Bengal Northeast India Industrial Value Chain Concept' with the cooperation of India and Bangladesh.<sup>4</sup> Japan is also aiming to further this cooperation with Bangladesh by exploring an economic partnership agreement.

A major highlight of Kishida's visit was that he laid out a new plan for Japan's Indo-Pacific region. He pointed out four new pillars as areas of cooperation for a free and open Indo-Pacific:

- Principles for peace and rules for prosperity
- Attempting to address challenges in an Indo-Pacific way
- Focusing on multi-layered connectivity
- Making efforts for safe and secure use of the sea to the air

Kishida emphasised that the new plan aims to oppose the use of force, defend the rule of law, and create connectivity opportunities. Kishida said, "Our FOIP' needs to be undertaken together with various countries and stakeholders. Japan will strengthen coordination with the US, Australia, South Korea, Canada, Europe and elsewhere. Of course, India is indispensable."<sup>5</sup> Kishida also announced that Japan would spend around US \$2 billion in the next three years to help Indo-Pacific nations with proper equipment, such as patrol boats, and train their personnel to increase maritime law enforcement capabilities. The new Indo-Pacific strategy would also include green initiatives and economic security. India remains a vital partner in Japan's new Indo-Pacific plan as well, and it is also seen as Japan's bid to forge stronger ties with countries in south and southeast Asia to counter China's aggressive moves in the region. Kishida also pledged US \$75 billion to the Indo-Pacific region by 2030 through 'Yen loans' and emphasised ramping up aid through government grants.<sup>6</sup>

Both leaders also discussed the challenges faced by China's aggressive behaviour and agreed that India and Japan would cooperate with other like-minded countries to address such challenges and ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific. India and Japan are focusing on enhancing their defence cooperation to counter Beijing's assertiveness in the region. Both nations recently conducted their first joint air exercise between fighter aircraft of Japan's air self-defence force and the Indian Air Force, known as 'Veer Guardian 2023.' Such regular bilateral training and military exercises would help deepen security and defence cooperation between India and Japan. Countering China's assertiveness has become essential for both nations, as Japan's new Indo-Pacific plan has come at a time when tensions are rising between China and Japan over the territorial dispute over the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea. China's territorial claims thus remain a challenge for both India and Japan. Japan has also begun working on countermeasures as a response to China's bullying tactics in the region. The whole of Southeast Asia is also

concerned with China's territorial claims as, like Japan, they also face threats from North Korea's missile and nuclear development.

The fundamental aim behind India-Japan cooperation is stabilising the Indo-Pacific region by focusing on controlling China's behaviour. An increase in Japan's defence expenditure would provide Japan with new military power in the region, which would in turn be beneficial for India-Japan security ties in countering China's moves in the region. It is interesting to see how both India and Japan cooperate while holding their presidencies at the G20 and G7, respectively.

## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Gurjit Singh, 'Fumio Kishida's India visit: Personal invite to Narendra Modi for G7 Summit in Hiroshima boosts India's global stature,' *First Post*, March 23, 2023, <https://www.firstpost.com/opinion/fumio-kishidas-india-visit-personal-invite-to-narendra-modi-for-g7-summit-in-hiroshima-boosts-indias-global-stature-12336512.html>. Accessed on March 27, 2023

<sup>2</sup> "JICA signs grant agreement of 4 billion Yen (INR 250 crores approx.) with the Government of India for the 'Project for the Improvement of Power Supply in Andaman and Nicobar Islands'," *Japan International Cooperation Agency*, March 30, 2022, <https://www.jica.go.jp/india/english/office/topics/press220330.html>. Accessed on March 28, 2023

<sup>3</sup> "Japan-India relations," *Invest India*, <https://www.investindia.gov.in/country/japan-plus>. Accessed on March 29, 2023

<sup>4</sup> "Japan to promote Bay of Bengal-NE India industrial value chain concept in cooperation with India and Bangladesh : Prime Minister Fumio Kishida," *DD News*, March 21, 2023, <https://ddnews.gov.in/international/japan-promote-bay-bengal-ne-india-industrial-value-chain-concept-cooperation-india-and>. Accessed on March 30, 2023

<sup>5</sup> Rezaul H Laskar, "Japanese PM Fumio Kishida, Modi discuss ties, Indo-Pacific plan," *Hindustan Times*, March 21, 2023, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/kishida-modi-discuss-ties-indo-pacific-plan-101679337933001.html>. Accessed on March 30, 2023

<sup>6</sup> Kiran Sharma, "Kishida pledges \$75bn for Indo-Pacific infrastructure on India trip," *Nikkei Asia*, March 20, 2023, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Kishida-pledges-75bn-for-Indo-Pacific-infrastructure-on-India-trip>. Accessed on March 30, 2023