



## Recent Developments in Indo-Japanese Relations

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Indo-Japanese relations have been assessed in the light of the successive visits of the Japanese Emperor and the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to India in the months of December and January. While lauding the visits of the Emperor and the Prime Minister as marker of the stage to which the bilateral relations between India and Japan have reached but the relationship has been advancing since the beginning of the present century. It was argued that no outstanding agreement was negotiated or achieved between the two countries during the visit of the Japanese Prime Minister. The symbolic aspects of the two visits could not be overlooked.

India-Japan relations have come a long way in the last century. What distinguishes Indo-Japan relations in this century is that the relationship is no longer asymmetrical unlike in the last century when it was entirely one-sided, a relationship which was not based on equality and India was constantly begging for aid from Japan. During this phase relationship was not always cordial and India despite being at that time one of the major recipients of Japanese aid was still treated as an inferior partner.

Nevertheless, Japan had come to its rescue in 1991 when India had a double digit deficit by providing 350 million dollars aid to India when no other country was ready to help India. But the period, 1998-2000 worst period in India- Japan bilateral relations. Japanese Government reacted to the happenings in India such as the Babri Masjid incident or the nuclear explosion and future aids were stopped to India while they did not stop on going aid.

Prime Minister Mori's visit to India in the present century marked a significant change in the bilateral relations. Mori during his visit castigated Pakistan for the Kargil crisis and in the joint statement for the first time called India a global power until that time India was not even recognized as in Asia. This transition took place due to recognition of mutuality of interests, most importantly in terms of business prospects for the Japanese in the huge Indian markets. Now economic interest has become the major aspect of Indo-Japanese bilateral relations. This was brought about due to the recognition of India as a huge, rapidly growing market and recognition of India as a superior knowledge power hub and other service sectors and a reservoir of talents vis-à-vis the demographic deficit that Japan was facing. Also India proved to be an important investment destination and expanding market for the Japanese.

The visit of Koizumi in 2005 further strengthened the relations between the two countries. Koizumi in his joint statement had said "a strong, prosperous and dynamic India is in the interest of Japan and vice-versa". India and Japan worked together as G4 demanding UN reforms – a new transformation in

the relationship which was characterized by increasing cooperation and collaboration.

Abe in his recent visit said “relations between Japan and India have the greatest potential of any bilateral relationship anywhere in the world.” Abe’s comment is considered to be very significant, but this could very well be true in the realm of economical complementariness and similarities of political situation for instance both have an aggressive China as neighbor and bothersome neighbors like North Korea and Pakistan respectively.

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On the cultural side also, Abe has done a lot to strengthen cultural ties between the India and Japan due to his belief that economic and strategic relations must go hand in hand with cultural interactions. During his previous tenure as Prime Minister he brought a delegation of more than one dozen University Presidents as part of his delegation on his visit to India. Since then, Japanese universities have set up two centres in India to increase university grants and offer scholarships to Indian students in order to encourage students to go to Japan. It was argued that there are lots of potential for further economic cooperation between the two countries.

China is definitely a factor in Indo-Japan relations but Japan does not want to get involved in this due to its own limitations. Article 9 in the Japanese constitution prohibits military engagement with other countries. But most importantly due to its self-imposed limitation of projecting itself as a peaceful nation, Japan has imposed restrictions of export of weapons.

India's stand on the issue of the Senkaku islands is clear and in the recent joint statement Prime Minister Singh has appreciated Japan's efforts in contributing to peace and stability in the region and the world. Abe's recent visit to the Yasukuni shrine was intended towards not only sending a strong message to China that it is going to put up a strong resistance on the issue of the Senkaku island issue but most importantly to create national spirit among the Japanese and to bring in the resurgence of nationalism in Japan.

The following issues were discussed during the Q&A:

1. What could be the motive behind Japanese offering scholarships to Indian students? What do the Japanese gain from offering scholarships? The purpose of giving scholarship has been primarily to create soft power similar to what the Western countries have been doing over the years. However, due to demographic deficit in Japan, offering scholarships to Indian students could also be a means to increase its own pool to absorb in its industries.
2. Due to Chinese pressure, India is hesitant in conducting joint military exercises with the Japan. Was anything discussed with Abe during the recent visit and what is the speaker's opinion on the issue? India has not been discouraging joint military exercises with Japan. India has invited Japan to be a part of the Malabar Exercise, a joint naval exercises of democracies, which has been accepted by Japan during the visit of the Japanese Defence Minister in the previous month. He said that Indian navy, being one of the best in the world could be of immense help to Japan to secure its supplies.
3. Why no development has taken place on the issue of India- Japan nuclear deal?

There have been several rounds of negotiations but not much progress has happened. Both the countries have not yet signed a deal despite many influential Japanese industrial houses putting pressure of their government. Japan wants India to sign NPT and CTBT before signing a nuclear deal, which according to the speaker is a very hypocritical stand taken by the Japanese Government given the fact that it is so well equipped to build nuclear bombs any time.

4. How practical is Indian government's request to Japan to build infrastructure? It is a very welcome move and the speaker himself had in fact proposed to the Indian Government to bring in Japanese investment for the development of the North East. Japanese investment and Japanese goodwill should pave the way to connect the North East to the ASEAN. Moreover, to avoid any confrontation with the China, he suggested that Arunachal Pradesh should be kept out of this project.
5. How does the speaker rate the reaction of the Indian media to the visit of Abe? Abe's visit was so much hyped vis-à-vis the lack of hype on the visit of the Emperor. The over hyped coverage of Abe's visit appeared to be a compensation for lack luster media coverage on the Emperor's visit.
6. Was the visit of Abe to the Yasukuni shrine a sign of revival of militarism in Japan? The speaker does not see any revival of militarism among the Japanese people. The fact is that the Japanese people still do not trust their own military. However, there are sections in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) which is certainly more nationalistic but it is still a small minority. According to him, the visit to Yasukuni can be seen as an effort by Abe towards revival of spirit among the Japanese youth which has been on a serious decline in the recent years.
7. The shared strategic vision between Japan and India being a constructed rather than a natural one, how much can it bear the test of time? How much can India leverage this economic interest shown by Japan? The strategic interests between Japan and India are constructed. The relationship between the two nations, at both economic and political level is a natural one and driven by mutuality of interests.
8. What would be Japan's position on the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands? How much is Japan concerned about those islands?

The Senkaku islands transforming into such a serious bone of contention between China and Japan as it is not a new issue. It is an effort towards enlarging the total area of navigation and pushing its shore further into the Pacific Ocean. However, gas and oil in the Senkaku islands could be the major reason for the resurgence of the issue.

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