



KAMARAJ IAS ACADEMY
Only IAS Academy by Grandson of "Perunthalsivam Kamarajar"

India-Japan Maritime Partnership Enters a More Operational Phase with Focus on Maritime Security, Logistics and Indo-Pacific Stability

Published On: 24-08-2026

Recent Developments and Strategic Significance:

- On **20 August 2026**, India and Japan signed a **Memorandum of Arrangement on Maritime Security Cooperation** in New Delhi during the meeting between Defence Minister **Rajnath Singh** and Japanese Defence Minister **Shinjiro Koizumi**. The arrangement provides a framework for deeper cooperation between the **Indian Navy** and the **Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force**.
- The arrangement covers **Maritime Domain Awareness**, information sharing, **Search and Rescue**, **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief**, naval ship visits, joint exercises, personnel and expert exchanges, and logistical support through ports and maintenance and repair facilities.
- The two sides also agreed to strengthen protection of **Sea Lines of Communication**, explore reciprocal access to ship-repair facilities, and examine opportunities for **joint development in naval shipbuilding and design** by combining Japan's technological capabilities with India's production capacity.
- The agreement builds on the broader **Special Strategic and Global Partnership**, established in 2014, and gives greater operational content to the strategic convergence between the two Indo-Pacific powers.
- The development follows the **16th India-Japan Annual Summit in July 2026**, where the two Prime Ministers identified defence and security cooperation, economic security, energy resilience, technology, innovation and people-to-people exchanges as major priorities.

Historical Evolution of India-Japan Relations:

Civilisational and Historical Linkages:

- India-Japan relations possess deep **civilisational linkages**, with Buddhism providing an important historical bridge between the two societies since the **6th century**.
- In **1949**, Prime Minister **Jawaharlal Nehru** gifted an elephant to Tokyo's Ueno Zoo as a symbol of friendship and optimism in the post-war period.
- Japanese Prime Minister **Nobusuke Kishi** visited India in **1957**, while Japan extended its first formal **yen loans** to India in **1958**, laying foundations for long-term economic cooperation.

Transformation into a Strategic Partnership:

- India and Japan upgraded their relationship from a **Global Partnership in 2000** to a **Special Strategic and Global Partnership in 2014**, reflecting the growing convergence of their economic and strategic interests.
- Annual summits have been held since **2006**, while more than **70 dialogue mechanisms** now cover foreign policy, defence, economic cooperation, technology, energy, infrastructure and healthcare.
- The **2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Dialogue**, defence policy dialogues and service-level interactions have institutionalised strategic consultations between the two countries.

Strategic and Indo-Pacific Convergence:

Kamaraj IAS Academy

Plot A P.127, AF block, 6 th street, 11th Main Rd, Shanthi Colony, Anna Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600040

Phone: **044 4353 9988 / 98403 94477 / Whatsapp : 09710729833**

Free and Open Indo-Pacific:

- India's **Act East Policy**, **SAGAR**, and **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative** broadly complement Japan's **Free and Open Indo-Pacific** vision.
- Both countries support a **free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific**, including respect for freedom of navigation and opposition to unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion.
- The partnership is therefore significant for maintaining a stable maritime order across the **Indian Ocean and wider Indo-Pacific**, particularly because both countries depend heavily on secure maritime trade routes.

Maritime Security:

- The new Maritime Security Arrangement strengthens practical cooperation between the **Indian Navy and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force** in maritime information sharing, exercises, rescue operations and logistics.
- Both sides intend to make bilateral exercises more complex by incorporating **unmanned systems**, multi-domain capabilities and short-notice exercises.
- The two countries are also exploring enhanced **mine countermeasure capabilities**, defence shipbuilding and naval design cooperation, creating scope for greater technological and industrial integration.
- India's growing shipbuilding and ship-repair capacity can complement Japan's advanced maritime technologies, while Japanese participation can support India's objective of **Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence manufacturing**.

Economic Relations:

Trade and Investment:

- The **India-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement** came into force in **August 2011**, covering trade in goods and services, movement of persons, investment, intellectual property and customs-related matters.
- India-Japan bilateral trade has expanded, but the overall volume remains below the potential of two large economies, with India continuing to face a significant **trade deficit** with Japan.
- India's major exports include **organic chemicals, vehicles, nuclear reactors, aluminium and aquatic products**, while major imports include **nuclear reactors, copper, electrical machinery, inorganic chemicals, iron and steel**.
- Japanese investment and technological expertise remain particularly important for India's **manufacturing, infrastructure, automobiles, electronics and advanced technology sectors**.

Economic Complementarity:

- Japan provides **capital, advanced technology, manufacturing expertise and infrastructure capabilities**, while India offers a large domestic market, a growing digital economy, a young workforce and expanding production capabilities.
- This complementarity can support resilient supply chains and reduce excessive dependence on concentrated production networks in critical sectors.

Defence and Security Cooperation:

Institutional Framework:

- Defence cooperation is supported by the **2008 Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation**, the **2014 Defence Cooperation Memorandum**, and the **2015 agreements on defence technology transfer and protection of classified military information**.

- The **2020 Reciprocal Provision of Supplies and Services arrangement** has facilitated logistical cooperation during military exercises, while earlier naval cooperation arrangements have strengthened service-to-service engagement.
- Regular **Army, Navy and Air Force staff talks**, military exchanges and bilateral exercises have progressively increased interoperability.

Military Exercises:

- Major exercises include **Dharma Guardian** between the armies and **JAIMEX** between the navies.
- **Veer Guardian 26** is scheduled to further deepen air-force cooperation, with Japanese fighter aircraft expected to participate in India for the first time.
- In **February 2026**, India, Japan and Indonesia conducted their first trilateral naval **PASSEX**, demonstrating the potential for extending bilateral cooperation to wider Indo-Pacific partnerships.

Technology, Space and Infrastructure Cooperation:

Defence Technology:

- India and Japan are developing **UNICORN radio antenna masts** for the Indian Navy, representing an important example of bilateral defence technology cooperation.
- The latest discussions also seek greater cooperation between **DRDO and Japan's Acquisition, Technology & Logistics Agency**, including advanced defence technologies and industrial collaboration.
- The two countries are exploring joint naval shipbuilding and design by combining **Japanese technological expertise with Indian production capabilities**.

Space Cooperation:

- **ISRO and JAXA** cooperate in areas including satellite navigation, space situational awareness and lunar exploration.
- The collaborative **Lunar Polar Exploration Mission**, also known as **LUPEX/Chandrayaan-5**, has advanced through the signing of its Phase-B Implementation Arrangement, with the mission forming an important component of India-Japan space cooperation.

Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail:

- The **Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail** project is India's first high-speed rail corridor and is being implemented with Japanese technical and financial assistance.
- The approximately **508.17 km** corridor is designed around **Shinkansen technology** and includes capacity development and skill enhancement for Indian personnel.
- The project also supports **Make in India**, technology absorption and development of domestic manufacturing capabilities.

Act East Forum:

- Established in **2017**, the **Act East Forum** provides an institutional mechanism for India-Japan cooperation under India's Act East Policy and Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision.
- It focuses particularly on the **North Eastern Region**, including connectivity, infrastructure, industrial linkages and people-to-people contacts.
- The forum can strengthen India's integration with the **Bay of Bengal, Southeast Asia and BIMSTEC region**.

Importance of the India-Japan Partnership:

Geopolitical and Maritime Balance:

Kamaraj IAS Academy

Plot A P.127, AF block, 6 th street, 11th Main Rd, Shanthi Colony, Anna Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600040

Phone: **044 4353 9988 / 98403 94477 / Whatsapp : 09710729833**

- India and Japan are important proponents of a **rules-based maritime order**, making their partnership significant for regional stability and freedom of navigation.
- Cooperation contributes to balancing strategic pressures in the Indo-Pacific without transforming the bilateral relationship into a formal military alliance.
- Both countries also cooperate through the **Quad with Australia and the United States**, where maritime security, critical technologies, economic security and humanitarian assistance are major areas of cooperation.

Economic and Technological Synergy:

- Japan's **advanced technology and capital** complement India's large market, digital public infrastructure, human resources and expanding manufacturing base.
- Cooperation in semiconductors, energy, infrastructure, defence production and emerging technologies can strengthen India's position in resilient global supply chains.
- The partnership can therefore contribute simultaneously to **economic security, technological capability and strategic autonomy**.

Energy Security:

- Both countries are major energy-importing economies and therefore share an interest in secure energy supply chains and uninterrupted maritime commerce.
- During the July 2026 summit, India and Japan adopted a **Joint Statement on Energy Resilience** and agreed to deepen cooperation across energy supply chains and strategic petroleum reserves.

Major Challenges:

Trade and Market Frictions:

- Bilateral trade remains below the potential of the two economies, while India continues to face a substantial trade imbalance with Japan.
- Japanese companies encounter regulatory complexity and standards-related requirements in India, while Indian exporters face stringent **phytosanitary and quality requirements** in Japan.
- Greater regulatory predictability, standards harmonisation and improved market access are therefore necessary.

Defence Production Bottlenecks:

- Despite frequent military exercises and strong political convergence, defence cooperation has not always translated into large-scale **co-production and co-development projects**.
- Differences over pricing, technology transfer, procurement procedures and commercial viability can delay major defence projects.
- The latest emphasis on joint shipbuilding, repair facilities and defence technology provides an opportunity to overcome this implementation gap.

Strategic Autonomy:

- India and Japan share broad strategic objectives but do not have identical foreign-policy positions on every global issue.
- India continues to emphasise **strategic autonomy**, including an independent approach towards Russia, whereas Japan remains closely aligned with the **G7 and its allied security framework**.
- Managing such differences without weakening bilateral trust remains essential.

Way Forward:

Kamaraj IAS Academy

Plot A P.127, AF block, 6 th street, 11th Main Rd, Shanthi Colony, Anna Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600040

Phone: **044 4353 9988 / 98403 94477** / Whatsapp : **09710729833**

Converting Strategic Convergence into Operational Capability:

- India and Japan should rapidly operationalise the new maritime arrangement through **regular information sharing, coordinated exercises, port access, repair facilities and logistics support**.
- The proposed **Director-General/Joint Secretary-level Working Group** should ensure coordination across operational, intelligence, equipment, technology and industrial domains.
- Defence cooperation should move from exercises towards **joint development, co-production, technology transfer and maintenance ecosystems**.
- Greater integration of unmanned systems, maritime surveillance and mine-countermeasure capabilities can strengthen Indo-Pacific maritime security.
- Cooperation through the **Indo-Pacific Logistics Network** can also support humanitarian assistance and disaster response across the region.
- Economic cooperation should focus on reducing regulatory barriers, expanding supply-chain partnerships and improving market access for Indian products in Japan.
- Greater cooperation in **semiconductors, critical technologies, clean energy, space and advanced manufacturing** can create a stronger economic-security partnership.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Prelims Facts:

- **Special Strategic and Global Partnership:** Established in **2014**.
- **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement:** Entered into force in **August 2011**.
- **Act East Forum:** Established in **2017**.
- **Major military exercises:** **Dharma Guardian, JAIMEX and Veer Guardian**.
- **Key space partnership:** **LUPEX/Chandrayaan-5** between ISRO and JAXA.
- **High-speed rail:** Mumbai-Ahmedabad corridor based on Japanese **Shinkansen technology**.
- **New development:** **2026 Memorandum of Arrangement on Maritime Security Cooperation**.
- **Key maritime concepts:** **Maritime Domain Awareness, Sea Lines of Communication, Search and Rescue, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief**.