



KAMARAJ IAS ACADEMY
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Japan Joins Military Exercise with Philippines and US for the First Time

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Japan has joined the large-scale Balikatan 2026 military exercise with the Philippines and the United States as a full participant for the first time. Earlier, Japan mainly joined only as an observer or for disaster response activities.

About Balikatan Exercise:

“Balikatan” means shoulder-to-shoulder

It is the annual joint military exercise of the Philippines and the US

The 2026 exercise runs from 20 April to 8 May

More than 17,000 troops are taking part

Countries involved include Japan, Australia, Canada, France, and New Zealand along with the US and the Philippines

Japan's Role:

Japan has deployed around 1,400 personnel from its Self-Defense Forces. It will also participate in live-fire drills, including the use of Type 88 anti-ship missiles, showing a major expansion of its defence role.

Why This is Important?

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The exercise aims to improve: Defence interoperability, Joint operational capability, Maritime security & Regional deterrence in the Indo-Pacific

It also sends a strong message against any unilateral attempt to change the regional status quo by force, especially amid rising tensions in the South China Sea and around Taiwan.

Background:

Japan's larger role became possible after the Japan–Philippines Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA), which came into effect in 2025 and allows easier deployment of forces between both countries.

Overall Significance: This marks stronger defence cooperation among Japan, the Philippines, and the US, and reflects growing strategic alignment in the Indo-Pacific region amid China-related security concerns.

List of Similar Important Military Exercises:

India Related:

Malabar Exercise ? India, US, Japan, Australia (Naval exercise)

Yudh Abhyas ? India and US (Army exercise)

Tiger Triumph ? India and US (Tri-services exercise)

Varuna ? India and France (Naval exercise)

Milan Exercise ? Multinational naval exercise hosted by India

SIMBEX ? India and Singapore (Naval exercise)

JIMEX ? India and Japan (Naval exercise)

INDRA ? India and Russia (Joint military exercise)

US and Allies Related:

Balikatan ? US and Philippines (with allies like Japan, Australia)

RIMPAC ? Rim of the Pacific Exercise; world's largest naval exercise led by the US

Cobra Gold ? Thailand and US-led multinational exercise

Talisman Sabre ? Australia and US joint military exercise

Keen Sword ? Japan and US bilateral military exercise

Red Flag ? US-led advanced air combat exercise

Japan Related:

Keen Edge ? Japan and US command-post exercise

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Dharma Guardian ? India and Japan army exercise

Orient Shield ? Japan and US ground force exercise

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