



South Korea and Japan Agree to Resume Naval Search and Rescue Exercises After 9 Years

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South Korea and Japan have agreed to resume their bilateral naval search and rescue exercises (SAREX) after a nine-year hiatus, as part of efforts to enhance military cooperation and mutual understanding.

The agreement was reached during talks between South Korean Defence Minister Ahn Gyu-back and Japanese Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi at Yokosuka, Japan.

Purpose of exercises:

The naval search and rescue exercises (SAREX) involve coordinated maritime drills by both nations' naval forces to practise responses to ship distress incidents and humanitarian rescue operations at sea.

Background on SAREX and Cooperation

Inception and history:

The Korea-Japan naval SAREX began in 1999 and was held regularly until 2017 before being suspended due to deteriorating bilateral relations.

It was conducted ten times before the hiatus.

Why it stopped:

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Bilateral military exchanges were halted after the 2018 radar lock-on dispute, where a Japanese aircraft and a South Korean warship had a contentious encounter, straining defence cooperation.

Significance of resumption:

Resuming SAREX reflects warming defence ties between Seoul and Tokyo amid broader regional security concerns, especially threats from North Korea's missile and nuclear programmes.

It also strengthens interoperability and trust between the Republic of Korea Navy (ROKN) and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF).

Broader context of defence cooperation:

South Korea and Japan have recently agreed to upgrade defence cooperation, including collaboration on advanced technologies like artificial intelligence and unmanned systems.

Both countries are part of the American–Japanese–Korean trilateral security framework, which aims to enhance collective defence and regional stability in the Indo-Pacific.