

The Modi-Abe summit

It was the turn of Narendra Modi to visit Japan in 2016 and this year it is the turn of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to pay a return visit to India, the tentative dates of which have been fixed for 12-14 September. The summit between Modi and Abe shall be the ninth between the two leaders. Both are expected to work to further advance the 'new era' in bilateral relations. The talks are expected to focus on infrastructure development, nuclear cooperation, and regional security



The annual summit meetings between the Prime Ministers of India and Japan, alternating between New Delhi and Tokyo, have been going on since 2006. This has provided the right platform for up-scaling bilateral ties, which have become robust over the years as both find whenever they meet that there are common viewpoints on bilateral, regional and global issues. It has been a long journey for both. It was the turn of Narendra Modi to visit Japan in 2016 and this year it is the turn of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to pay a return visit to India, the tentative dates of which have been fixed for 12-14 September. It is time to take stock of what transpired in the previous meetings and what holds for the forthcoming meeting.

The meeting between Modi and Abe shall be the ninth between the two leaders. Both are expected to work to further advance the "new era" in bilateral relations. In 2016, both resolved to maximize mutual benefits by bringing together Japan's technology with the young workforce of India. Both also discussed ways to advance bilateral ties further "in areas such as politics and security, economy and economic cooperation, including promoting the high-speed railways between Mumbai and Ahmedabad as well as human resources development, and promoting people-to-people exchanges".

The remarks that Abe had made in the Indian Parliament on 22 August 2007 during his first term as Prime Minister still resonates in all the subsequent discussions that leaders and ministers of both countries have on a gamut of issues since then. Observing that we are now at a point at which the "confluence of the two Seas" is coming into being, Abe then remarked: "Japan-India relationship is blessed with the largest potential for development of any bilateral relationship anywhere in the world."

In 2006, Abe emphasized the importance of "free and open India and Pacific strategy" and saw India as the vital link between Asia and Africa. Furthering the interests of both countries in this paradigm is being demonstrated in the long-term strategy of fostering economic ties with a view to bring the larger Asia and Africa into their common fold. Also, Japan is an important cog in India's Act East policy which can only be furthered if peace and tranquility is maintained in the region. As tensions build up in South China Sea and the surrounding areas by unilateral attempts by a single power to take control, interests of not only India and Japan but also of other friendly nations in the region are at stake. Such developments demand greater consultation between the leaders of the two countries, which is why the annual summits are extremely important. There are other threats, both perceived and real, that continue to lurk in the horizon. The issues of terrorism, piracy, maritime security, honouring global rules, laws of the sea, etc. are much too important issues that can't be overlooked as each of these have a bearing on a nation's economic future. At the bilateral level, there are specific areas already identified in which both countries can expand cooperation. This essay identifies three core areas where the talks are likely to focus - infrastructure development, nuclear cooperation, and regional security.

The first relates to deepening cooperation in the area of infrastructure development. The Mumbai-Ahmedabad high-speed Shinkansen railway project, using Japanese technology

and capital, is the precursor to many such projects in the offing. Indeed, infrastructure development and connectivity is one of the priorities of the Modi government and Japan's cooperation is important. The decision to use the Shinkansen system for its high-speed railways to connect the western cities of Mumbai and Ahmedabad was reached between Abe and Modi in 2015. India plans to start construction of the roughly 500-mile rail link in 2018 and aims to have it operational in 2023.

Seen from the Japanese perspective, Abe is Japan's "top salesman" for the adoption of Japan's Shinkansen technology by other Indian railway systems. Abe also aims to win orders from China as well. This time, Abe is expected to participate in the groundbreaking ceremony in Ahmedabad, thereby celebrating birthdays of both leaders and hold bilateral talks. During his visit to Japan in November 2016, Modi had suggested holding the ceremony for the construction to start in September 2017. India has pledged to build high-speed railways focused on the four major cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai.

When Modi visited Japan in November 2016, he travelled by Shinkansen with Abe from Tokyo to Abe to visit a bullet-train plant of Kawasaki Heavy Industries Ltd., a manufacturer of Shinkansen cars.

The second area of cooperation is in the field of nuclear energy. The nuclear issue is an intensely sensitive matter in Japan and the anti-nuclear sentiment among the Japanese deepened after the Fukushima nuclear accident, following the Great Eastern earthquake of

March 2011. Therefore, negotiating a civil nuclear deal with Japan was not easy. After a protracted period of negotiations, the landmark Indo-Japanese civil nuclear deal was signed in November 2016 during Modi's visit. The Japanese government got approval from the Diet and the agreement came into force in July 2017 when Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar and Japanese ambassador Kenji Hiramatsu exchanged diplomatic notes in New Delhi, marking operationalization of the pact.

Japan is the world's leader in civil nuclear technology, with almost every advanced nuclear reactor in the world being dependent on Japanese components. The agreement will enable Japan to export nuclear power plant technology as well as provide finance for nuclear power plants in India. Japan would now assist India in nuclear waste management and could undertake joint manufacture of nuclear power plant components under the Make in India initiative.

Japanese industrial conglomerate Toshiba, which owns Westinghouse, will have a major role when the US nuclear major supplies technology for the pair of six reactors in Andhra Pradesh.

Hitachi, also from Japan, has stakes in GE, which has proposed to set up reactors in India. So the energy scenario in India is destined to undergo a dramatic overhaul in the coming years.

The third area of cooperation is in the field of defence and maritime security. In view of China's growing activities in the East and South China seas, the Indian Ocean and the on-going stand-off with India on the Doklam issue, both Modi and Abe are likely to seek an agreement in the field of defence and maritime security. They are also expected to discuss potential responses to North Korea, which continues to push forward with its nuclear and missile development programmes despite UN sanctions.



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