



TROT TO CANTER: INDIA-JAPAN RELATIONS UNDER THE NEW JAPANESE PM

by
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In the recently concluded parliamentary elections, Japan made history by electing its first female prime minister, Sanae Takaichi. Her victory gives the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) a fresh lease on life and offers the prospect of greater political stability. This moment could mark a transformative phase in India-Japan relations, as the new leadership's assertive security doctrine aligns closely with India's policy of strategic autonomy and its active engagement in the Indo-Pacific security architecture. The tenure of the late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (2012-2020) is widely regarded as the golden period of India-Japan relations, and his protégé's rise could once again generate strong momentum for bilateral cooperation. The new leadership is expected to emulate Abe's policies while reorienting Japan's ideological and policy trajectory, particularly through [stronger](#) geopolitical collaboration with India. This blog explores the multifaceted opportunities and the evolving trajectory of the India-Japan relationship under Japan's new leadership.

A Trusted Partnership

India and Japan have significantly transformed their bilateral relationship since the early 2000s. Japanese capital and technology have played a vital role in shaping India's infrastructure, from the substantial loan granted for the Delhi Metro to the ongoing Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail (MAHSR) project. During her tenure as Communications Minister in 2015 and 2017, Sanae Takaichi engaged extensively with New Delhi, focusing on cooperation in the digital economy, smart city projects, and cybersecurity. Meanwhile, India's role in the Indo-Pacific has garnered attention and praise. It is increasingly viewed as a democratic, technological, and manufacturing partner critical for global supply chain diversification. India also occupies

a pivotal position in Japan's economic security strategy, particularly with regard to semiconductors, telecommunications, and rare-earth minerals.

Under the new leadership, India-Japan relations are expected to gain renewed momentum. Although Prime Minister Takaichi has never visited India, she has maintained close contact with the Indian Embassy in Tokyo. Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Takaichi share a common emphasis on self-reliance and economic revival, values that suggest continuity and stability in bilateral cooperation. Both [governments](#) are aligned in their inward-focused but growth-oriented economic outlooks.

While Japan's alliance with the U.S. remains the cornerstone of its security policy, relations between the two have been strained under the Trump administration, particularly over tariffs and defence burden-sharing. In contrast, India and Japan have steadily [deepened](#) their strategic partnership, expanding collaboration in infrastructure, digital technology, and labor mobility. Defence ties too have deepened and hold immense potential for the future.

Under the new regime, Japan is likely to adopt a more "hawkish" stance toward China, signaling a shift toward a more [assertive](#) foreign policy. Consequently, Japan can be expected to seek a closer strategic engagement with its Indo-Pacific partners, especially India. The continued commitment to a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) ensures that India will remain central to Japan's [strategic](#) calculus under Prime Minister Takaichi's leadership.

The Expanding Horizon

The Japan-India axis is set to expand its engagement beyond traditional areas while maintaining a strong focus on economic security. Deeper collaboration with trusted partners allows Japan to shield its technology base from vulnerabilities linked to Chinese supply chains. Within this framework, India is positioned at a strategic sweet spot. Accelerated bilateral agreements on semiconductors, rare-earths, and AI infrastructure indicate greater engagement. Joint R&D effort and a tighter contingency network

to mitigate chip supply shocks, particularly under the Quad framework, could further intensify cooperation. A security-driven approach focused on technology sovereignty necessitates convergence with India as a pragmatic and indispensable partner.

A more assertive Indo-Pacific stance is likely to [boost](#) bilateral defense ties, with Japan ready to invest in the co-development of defense technologies and enhanced maritime domain awareness. The new leadership in Japan supports a hard-power diplomacy, expanding the role of the Japanese Self-Defence Forces (JSDF) and deepening the Quad's operational mechanisms. Tokyo has also initiated dialogues with India and Indian Ocean littoral states on anti-piracy operations, maritime security, and regional surveillance. India's naval capabilities will enable Japan to extend its presence safely across critical sea lanes.

An emerging Japan–India–Indian Ocean Region–Africa [initiative](#) exemplifies this forward-looking vision. This triangular cooperation combining India's project management, Japan's capital, and African host-country engagement has the potential to create transformative economic corridors that integrate trade, technology, security, and human capital development across strategic geographies.

At the same time, China remains a unifying factor. India and Japan share similar perceptions of Beijing's ambitions and aim to counter Chinese assertiveness in both the Indian Ocean and the technology domain. Their approach is to cooperate where useful and deter where necessary, translating into more naval exercises, joint drills, and enhanced domain awareness. This will allow Delhi and Tokyo to achieve strategic clarity while maintaining respective hedging strategies.

Parallel to these hard-power dynamics, soft power diplomacy continues to anchor India-Japan relations. The personal rapport between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former Japanese Prime Ministers Shinzo Abe and Fumio Kishida fostered unprecedented trust. The new Prime Minister

Takaichi, closely aligned with Abe's ideological camp, is likewise expected to value strong democratic partnerships—signaling continuity and stability in bilateral ties.

A more professional, yet pragmatic, relationship is thus coming to the fore. Both leaders share a belief in self-reliance, technology-driven economic nationalism, and a firm stance on sovereignty, alongside a shared vision of Quad cohesion and resilient supply chains in the face of China's rise.

A Cautious Tread of the Tightrope

Caution is needed regarding the new leadership's more right-wing stance on immigration, which may slow progress on the mobility partnership between the two countries. In August 2025, Prime Minister Modi and former Prime Minister Ishiba signed an “Action Plan for India-Japan Human Resource Exchange and Cooperation” aimed at facilitating a two-way exchange of 500,000 personnel over five years, including 50,000 skilled personnel and potential talent from India to Japan. However, Takaichi's hardline position on immigration raises questions about the program's future. Uncertainty continues to loom over the prospects of this cooperation.

New Delhi and Tokyo must now deliver on [ministerials](#) and working groups, especially in areas such as supply chains, critical technologies, and maritime domain awareness. The partnership will likely become more dynamic, but the real test lies in effective execution and timely implementation, especially in projects stalled by bureaucratic delays. The long-discussed US-2 amphibious aircraft deal, the scaling up of Japanese FDI in India's manufacturing hubs beyond the automotive and electronics sectors, and joint efforts to de-risk supply chains all need renewed negotiations and a more accommodating diplomatic approach.

Additionally, tensions between India and the U.S. over trade and tariffs have held up the scheduling of the Quad Summit. A more proactive role by Japan



in shoring up the Quad partnership and serving as a bridge between India and the U.S. could help strategically integrate like-minded nations, despite the challenges posed by tariff disputes.

Conclusion

Japan brings capital, technology, and strategic heft to the table, aligning with India's vision of a trusted and reliable partner. Under PM Takaichi's leadership, India–Japan ties are expected to flourish across areas ranging from infrastructure and human capital to accelerated defence integration and regional engagement across the Indo-Pacific and Africa. The bilateral relationship appears poised to enter a more strategic phase, blending existing cooperation with emerging areas of collaboration in digital and space cooperation.

Flagship initiatives such as the Delhi–Mumbai Industrial Corridor, Mumbai–Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail, defence co-production, and human resource partnerships reflect a comprehensive vision for regional integration. However, the resilience of the India–Japan partnership will ultimately depend on ideological respect, mutual adaptability, and a shared commitment to a rules-based regional order, testing the true strength of their partnership.

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