

**India and Japan:
Partnership Built on “Kizuna”**

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For India and Japan, the year 2011 ended on a high note. The Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his Japanese counterpart Yoshihiko Noda met in New Delhi on December 28 and renewed their commitment to take the bilateral relations and the strategic partnership to new heights based on People-to-People “Kizuna” (the Bonds of Friendship).

Strengthened bilateral relationship

The two leaders announced a number of initiatives to enhance bilateral economic and security cooperation. Both sides agreed to boost bilateral trade and increase it to US \$25 billion by 2014 which is currently pegged at US \$ 14 billion. The Japanese leader also announced an investment of US \$ 4.5 billion over the next five years to implement the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor project that will generate employment and improve connectivity. New Delhi has been highly appreciative of Japanese initiatives keeping in mind that Tokyo would be spending huge fiscal resources for rebuilding cities and localities affected by the March 2011 earthquake, Tsunami and nuclear accident at Fukushima.

In the security domain, the Indian Navy and the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force are scheduled to conduct joint naval exercises in January 2012 to enhance maritime security in the piracy prone Indian Ocean. India and Japan also reiterated their commitment to ‘the universally-agreed principles of international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and other relevant international maritime law’ signaling concerns over China’s assertiveness in the South China Sea.

Temporary reconciliatory moves from China

The latter has not gone well with China and there have been sharp reactions particularly from the Chinese strategic community who has observed that India and Japan are joining hands to counter balance China and that Prime Minister Noda has “formed a strategy of containing China by shaping an arc from Northeast Asia to

Southeast Asia, with the US as a backup force.” Beijing has also noted with concern the trilateral strategic dialogue among India, Japan and the US held in Washington on December 19, 2011 and the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman noted that the trilateral meetings should not undermine regional peace, stability and development.

China is naturally concerned about the ‘concert of democracies’ that is being reconstructed and it would not be long before Australia joins the trilateral dialogue and recreate the ‘Democratic 4’ that was first conceptualized in 2007 during the Indian led Malabar series of naval exercises held in the Bay of Bengal. Also, China had to make reconciliatory moves by agreeing to discuss with other claimants the issue of a legally binding Code of Conduct in South China Sea.

It may appear that China is on the back foot, but it is fair to argue that this is only a temporary phase allowing Beijing to mend fences with its Southeast Asian neighbours and relieve some of the US pressure on the South China Sea issue. China can be expected to return with new initiatives that will possess necessary coercive and cooperative tools to challenge the ‘concert of democracies’.

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