

“India and Japan: Shaping the Indo-Pacific”

6:00 pm – 7:30 pm: 22 December, 2011

WWF Auditorium, 172-B, Lodhi Estate, New Delhi



The recent trend in International Relations demonstrates a pivoting towards Asia. Further, with the rise of the two great Asian powers of India and China and the growing geo-strategic importance of the Indian Ocean as well as the increasing relevance of the East Asia Summit (EAS), it becomes important for India to reach out to its neighbours in the east. Meanwhile, the Indo – Pacific region is still in the process of creation and can be built through Track II diplomacy, efforts of the intellectual academia and the alliance of maritime democracies. In this context, Aspen Institute India organized a panel discussion on “India and Japan: Shaping the Indo-Pacific”.

The discussion was chaired by Ambassador H K Singh, Former Indian Ambassador to Japan and ICRIER-Wadhvani Chair in India-US Policy Studies. He introduced the discussion by highlighting the history of positive interactions between India and Japan. The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between India and Japan has reached a conclusion and Japan remains committed to its Official Development Assistance (ODA) towards India. All this shows that in the last ten years this relationship has gained momentum.

Moreover, with India’s entry into the EAS, the pace has been set for an EAS centered framework for regional architecture in Asia. Accordingly, there is a need to boost the security pact and defense cooperation between India and Japan. There is a definite Indo – Pacific confluence in the seas and a joint maritime strategy between the two nations must include maritime self-defense activities between the Indo – Japan navies.

Akitaka Saiki, Ambassador of Japan to India, stated that it was necessary for India and Japan to build a global partnership by taking responsibility for global issues like the nuclear proliferation threat

emanating from North Korea. Both nations required to find effective institutions to tackle the common problem of sluggishness in the world economy. Maritime security is another issue that is important for both India and Japan because there is a need to deal with piracy threats and ensure the safety of our sea lanes, trade routes and energy lifelines.

Akihiko Tanaka, Professor of International Politics at the Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia, Tokyo University, emphasized the need for community building in Asia wherein an inclusive regional community can be created. There is a need to continue with the 6 party talks with North Korea and to pursue the Indo – US - Japan trilateral relationship. Efforts must be made to create a regional environment that makes China cooperate in the region through responsible behavior. In terms of Japan's security strategy, Japan must build a multi-layered framework corresponding to different levels of cooperation such as cooperation with North East Asia (Japan-South Korea bilateral summit), cooperation with East Asia (ASEAN +3 Mechanism), cooperation with the Pacific (APEC) and cooperation with the Indo – Pacific (EAS).

Amitabh Kant, CEO and MD of the Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor Development Corporation (DMICDC), stressed on the use of Japanese technology to improvise on the Indian infrastructure story. India's urbanization challenge can be met through the creation of smart cities built in collaboration with advanced technology inputs from Japan. The easing of capital regulation will enable India to get infrastructure funds from Japan at a low cost and on a long term basis. Overall, sincere efforts have to be made to enable Japanese companies to establish India as a base for the global market.

Makoto Suzuki, Vice-President of JCCII, added to Mr. Kant's argument by stating that it was imperative to improve the business environment in India for bettering the economic ties between the two countries. Therefore, it was necessary for India to undertake measures relating to deregulation of the economy, simplification of permits, fiscal reforms, land acquisition, social security, logistics distribution etc.

Many interesting issues came up during the Q & A round such as the greater desire of ASEAN nations to see India play a more assertive role in the Indian Ocean, resolution of the gaps in Indo-Japan ties like the civilian nuclear deal, efforts towards building of the Indo-US-Japan Trilateral, promotion of cultural understanding between India and Japan through people to people contacts etc.

Ambassador H K Singh, summing up the session stated that the Indo – Japan relations are mutually beneficial, productive and successful and therefore must be pursued further in a sustainable and consistent manner. A seamless cooperation must be built across the Indo-Pacific.

To know more about the panel discussion, click on the video link.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7guMQNrGw3Q&list=UUIvdd1ncT8Z9OtE6gEXc8HQ&index=1&feature=plcp>