

India-Japan-France Workshop on the Indo-Pacific
Embassy of Japan | Embassy of France | ORF
January 19, 2021 (13:00-15:30 IST)

Opening

- Namaste and Bonjour. I'm delighted to be here with you today. It is our great pleasure to co-organize this workshop together with the French Embassy, and I would also like to thank ORF for organizing the event with us.

Japan's Indo-Pacific Vision

- These days, we all hear or read the word "Indo-Pacific" almost every day. "Indo-Pacific" is no longer the name of some specific countries' foreign policy but it is a widely accepted term that reflects common strategic thinking in today's geopolitical reality. More and more countries are putting out their own visions for the Indo-Pacific region and that only confirms this view. The ASEAN's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and Germany's Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific region are recent cases in point. And I'm glad to have our French colleagues here with us today because France, an Indo-Pacific nation, was the first European country to announce its Indo-Pacific policy.
- I would like to begin by touching upon some key elements of Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision, as we were among the first to advocate the Indo-Pacific concept.
- You may recall it was here in Delhi in 2007 that then Prime Minister Abe first pointed to the emerging dynamics of the region by describing the Pacific Ocean and the Indian

Ocean as “seas of freedom and of prosperity”. And later, in 2016, during his visit to Kenya, he unveiled Japan’s “Indo-Pacific Vision” : a vision to make this region into a place where fundamental principles such as the rule of law, freedom of navigation and free trade are firmly upheld. Under this Vision, prosperity is pursued by, for example, improving connectivity through quality infrastructure projects, and peace and stability are to be ensured by enhancing Maritime Domain Awareness and other capabilities of the region.

- The Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision has been the core diplomatic concept that Japan stands on. And it remains so under the current PM Suga’s administration, as demonstrated by his first foreign visit destinations being Vietnam and Indonesia. Japan hosted the Quad Foreign Ministers’ Meeting right after the inauguration of the current administration despite the challenges related to the COVID-19 situation; this is another testament to our continued efforts. Let me assure you that Japan’s commitment to this vision remains unwavering.

Cooperation with like-minded countries: India and France

- What I would like to emphasize here is that this vision of a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific cannot be achieved by a single country alone. It requires collective efforts of like-minded countries like India and France. At the heart of this shared vision are universal values such as freedom, openness, and inclusiveness. And I believe this emphasis on fundamental values and principles is also the reason why this vision is getting tractions across the world.

- It goes without saying that India is the indispensable partner in Japan's endeavor to achieve our vision. A free and open Indo-Pacific is a natural shared goal for the two Asian maritime powers: Japan in the Pacific and India in the Indian Ocean. Towards this goal, we have been deepening our cooperation in all areas such as maritime security, connectivity, and HA/DR. In addition to our bilateral efforts, Quad is another platform where Japan and India have been working together to this end. In my previous capacity as Deputy Minister for Foreign Policy, I myself took a lead at the Quad Senior Officials Meetings for two years since 2017. Therefore, I am among the most pleased to see the success of the 2nd Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting in October last year.

- Japan attaches a great significance to its cooperation with France in this Indo-Pacific region. As specified in the road map on Japan-France cooperation issued at the bilateral summit meeting in June 2019, the two countries are committed to concrete cooperation in various areas including maritime security and climate change in order to achieve a free and open Indo-Pacific. Tokyo and Paris have been engaging in substantive discussions through frameworks such as the Japan-France Comprehensive Maritime Dialogue and the Japan-France Indo-Pacific Working Group. Japan-France 2+2 Ministerial Meetings have been another important venue to discuss our Indo-Pacific collaboration.

- Building upon those bilateral discussions, we're launching

tangible cooperation across this region. Both Japan and France joined in “La Perouse” naval exercise in the Indian Ocean together with Australia and the US in 2019. In Cambodia, we are jointly working on a waterworks system project. In Madagascar, the French Embassy and JICA co-organized a forum on waste disposal and climate change.

- I should leave it to Ambassador Lenain to elaborate on France-India cooperation, but I believe no further explanation is needed to layout the three countries’ shared vision of the Indo-Pacific and a tremendous potential for trilateral cooperation toward this end. We should seek partnership with other like-minded states like ASEAN member countries, having ASEAN centrality in mind.

Today’s topic: Maritime Security and Digital Connectivity

- Today’s topics, maritime security and digital connectivity, are important areas for trilateral discussion. As the challenges in these areas go beyond geographical boundaries, international cooperation is essential, and region-wide trilateral cooperation should make a difference.
- Just to stress the importance of digital space in the context of our Indo-Pacific vision, let me point out that nothing other than digital technologies can connect people, allow children to learn, and keep economies up and running, when physical movements are hampered under the COVID pandemic. Digital enhances connectivity.
- Japan and India established our Digital Partnership in 2018, and just a few days ago, Ministers in charge signed

an MOC in the ICT cooperation. I think trilateral cooperation with France should be further explored in this important area.

Conclusion

- I am sure that today's workshop will be a great first step of our joint efforts for the future India-Japan-France trilateral cooperation. I'm very much looking forward to hearing all the insights and ideas from the distinguished speakers and participants. I wish you fruitful discussions today. Thank you very much.