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Digest

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US-Japan launched the Competitiveness and Resilience (CoRe) Partnership

In order to advance the shared vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide visited the US for a summit meeting with President Biden on April 16. The aim was to bolster the US-Japan alliance in dealing with the challenges to the rules-based international order.

Washington and Tokyo have initiated the Competitiveness and Resilience (CoRe) Partnership in order to drive economic development based on open and democratic principles, transparent trade rules, and high governance standards. CoRe partnership is focussed on three key areas including competitiveness and innovation; COVID-19 response, global health, and health security; and climate change and green growth. Advancing digital economy and emerging technologies remain a priority and the focus is on bolstering R&D cooperation in biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and quantum information sciences. Security of 5G networks, advancing next-generation mobile networks like 6G and strengthening competitiveness in the digital field are prioritised. In this regard, the US and Japan committed \$4.5 billion.

China featured as an important plank of the discussion, and both leaders underscored the “importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and encourage the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues.” Additionally, they opposed any unilateral attempts to alter the status quo in the East China Sea, and reaffirmed that Article V of the Treaty applies to the Senkaku Islands. The discussions focused on upholding international law in the maritime domain, and bolstering defence cooperation across all domains, including

cyber and space. They also objected to China’s “unlawful maritime claims and activities in the South China Sea”. Moreover, developments in Hong Kong and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region were also discussed. Both leaders argued the importance of advancing cooperation through the Quad mechanism involving India and Australia to realise the goal of a free, open, accessible Indo-Pacific.

India-Japan-Australia launched the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative

On April 27, India-Japan-Australia officially launched the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) following high-level consultation on supply chain vulnerabilities and risk management since September 2020. Advancing the initiative, the focus will be on enhanced utilization of digital technology, and trade and investment diversification. Going forward, countries will share their respective best practices, and hold investment promotion and buyer-seller events to enable opportunities for stakeholders to diversify supply chain. Trade ministers of three countries will continue to meet to guide the effective implementation of SCRI and further develop it. Expanding SCRI might be considered based on consensus.

Japan-Germany steps up cooperation in 2+2 format

In pursuit of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, Tokyo has engaged in a series of 2+2 defence and foreign ministerial meetings with not just the Quad countries but also European powers, especially with Germany, the UK and France.

On April 13, the maiden Japan-Germany 2+2 meeting was held. Key theme of the discussion remained strengthening a free and open international order based on rule of law. As Germany plans to send navy

frigate to the Indo-Pacific, Japan aims to step up cooperation by way of joint exercises, and monitoring and surveillance of illicit ship-to-ship transfers by North Korea-related vessels. Additionally, Japan-Germany Agreement on the Security of Information entered into force which enables exchange of confidential information and intensifies cooperation on security policy and military technology.

Liaoning sailed between Okinawa's main island and Miyakojima

In late April, Japanese defence ministry confirmed that Chinese aircraft carrier group, led by the Liaoning, sailed between Okinawa's main island and Miyakojima, and entered the East China Sea. Japan's Air Self-Defence Force (JASDF) jets had to scramble as an early warning helicopter took off from the Liaoning and reportedly came 50-100 km to the northeast of Taisho Island. The defence ministry has confirmed that Japanese airspace and territorial waters were not violated. Earlier in the same month, the fleet sailed south in the same area and entered the Pacific. China has stated earlier that the aircraft carrier group conducted a naval exercise near Taiwan.

Japan gives SDF equipment to Philippines through ODA

Advancing defence cooperation, Tokyo is extending lifesaving Self-Defence Force (SDF) equipment to Manila through ODA. Following the 2015 aid charter, Japan can extend ODA aimed at supporting foreign forces in noncombat areas including disaster relief, infrastructure and coast guard activities. Japan will reportedly give

\$1.1 million for delivery of disaster relief equipments such as jackhammers, sonars and engine cutters. Subsequently, Tokyo will send Ground Self-Defence Force personnel to train the Filipino counterparts for effective utilisation of these equipments. Manila has reportedly commissioned into service ten Japanese-made patrol vessels for its coast guard fleet from 2016-2018 through Japanese aid loan.

Diet approves RCEP

On April 28, Japan's Diet approved Tokyo's participation in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Government estimates indicate that RCEP will boost exports and investment and raise the GDP by about 2.7 percent, relatively greater than the estimated increase of about 1.5 percent from the CPTPP.

Modi-Suga advances Special Strategic and Global Partnership

Prime Minister Narendra Modi held telephone talk with his Japanese counterpart Suga Yoshihide on April 26. Stepping up cooperation in dealing with the challenges posed by the pandemic constituted the mainstay of the discussion. Subsequently, Japan has extended \$50.3 million in additional grant aid to India to help fight the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, both leaders discussed the urgency of creating resilient, diversified and trustworthy supply chain of critical materials and technologies, and further deepening partnership in manufacturing and skill development. In this regards, the Specified Skilled workers (SSW) agreement will play a crucial role.