

India, US, Japan to collaborate on maritime security, regional connectivity

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New York: Reflecting the growing convergence of their interests in the Indo-Pacific region, India, US and Japan have agreed to work together to maintain maritime security through greater collaboration and strengthen regional connectivity.

The agreement was reached at the inaugural US-India-Japan Trilateral Ministerial dialogue held here Tuesday on the sidelines of the 70th UN General Assembly session.

US Secretary of State John Kerry hosted the dialogue with Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida.

Representing a quarter of the world's population and economic production power, the three countries highlighted their shared support for peace, democracy, prosperity, and a rules-based international order, according to a joint statement.

The three Ministers highlighted the growing convergence of their respective countries' interests in the Indo-Pacific region.

"It's an important moment for us to be able to underscore our interest in the Indo-Pacific region as part of India's East Asia policy, and also part of Japan's very active engagement with South and Southeast Asia," said Kerry.

"For India, the Asia Pacific and the Indian Ocean region is strategic to our security and economic interests," said Swaraj.

"The sea lanes of communication in the region are the lifetime - the lifeline of India's trade and commercial externalities."

"To realize our mutual objectives, we intend to grow our exchanges into complete trilateral engagement in other areas, including regional connectivity and humanitarian assistance in disaster situation," she said.

"The Pacific and the Indian Oceans are beginning to link together as oceans of freedom and prosperity, driving the advent of a new era when Indo-Pacific region becomes the epicenter of global prosperity," said Kishida.

"The trilateral partnership of the US, India, and Japan has an extremely important role to play in pulling this new era forward," he said.

The joint statement said the three ministers also underscored the importance of international law and peaceful settlement of disputes; freedom of navigation and overflight; and unimpeded lawful commerce, including in the South China Sea, it said.

They reiterated their support for ASEAN centrality in the multilateral political and security architecture in the Asia-Pacific region and emphasized the importance of the East Asia Summit as the premier leaders- level forum for addressing key political and security issues of the region.

The three countries agreed to work together to maintain maritime security through greater collaboration, the statement said.

The US and India welcomed Japan's participation in the 2015 MALABAR exercise.

Recognizing the three countries' extensive disaster response capabilities and converging interests, the three sides agreed to convene an experts-level group on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to enhance ability to respond jointly to complex disasters.

In an effort to capitalise on collective capacities in promoting regional economic linkages, the three Ministers launched an experts-level group on regional connectivity to identify collaborative efforts that can help strengthen regional connectivity, including between South and Southeast Asia.

The three Ministers expressed interest in exploring trilateral cooperation on women's skill enhancement and economic empowerment to further social and economic development.

All three Ministers welcomed the inaugural Trilateral Ministerial as a platform for strengthening cooperation and noted their interest in meeting again.

- IANS