

Japan, India negotiating military logistics pact in tightening of ties

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NEW DELHI (Reuters) - Japan hopes to clinch a military logistics pact with India that will allow access to each other's bases, Tokyo's envoy said on Monday, in a tightening of security ties seen as designed to balance China's growing weight in the region.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be visiting Japan this weekend for an annual summit with his counterpart Shinzo Abe, and the proposed Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement between the two militaries is on the agenda.

Under Modi and Abe, bilateral relations have rapidly expanded and the two countries conduct three-way naval exercises involving the United States in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific.

Japan's ambassador to India, Kenji Hiramatsu, said it was only natural for the two militaries to have a logistics-sharing agreement because of the large number of maneuvers they were carrying out each year.

"We hope to start formal negotiations with regard to signing of the ACSA. It is high time we had mutual logistics support," he said.

Under such a pact, Japanese ships would get access to fuel and servicing at major Indian naval bases including the Andaman and Nicobar islands, which lie near the Malacca Straits through which a large amount of Japan's but also China's trade and fuel supplies is shipped.

India's navy, which is increasingly sending ships further out as a way to counter China's expanding presence in the Indian Ocean, would get access to Japanese facilities for maintenance.

Modi's government signed a similar agreement with the United States in 2016 ending years of hesitation by previous administrations that worried about upsetting China.

Beijing has in the past expressed concern about multilateral and complex exercises, calling them destabilizing to the region.

Hiramatsu said Japan and India had a great deal of convergence with respect to freedom of navigation and transparency in the Indo-Pacific region.