Modi and Abe

Before talking in person, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi have reached out to each other via Twitter quite often. Modi is one of the three people whom Abe claims to follow on social media.

Abe's most recent tweet expressed his eagerness to meet with Modi days before his Indian guest embarked on a five-day visit to Japan, which started Saturday. On Monday the two elevated the Japan-India relationship to the "special strategic and global partnership".

Japan and India will launch a "two plus two" dialogue, involving their foreign and defence ministers. Japan has such dialogues with only the United States, Australia and France.

The two leaders agreed to continue joint naval exercises in addition to trilateral drills conducted with the US on a regular basis. And the two countries' coastguards will hold a joint exercise off the coast of Haneda in October.

They also agreed on promoting defence equipment and technology cooperation. Japan is mulling over exporting its maritime self-defence force's US-2 amphibious search-and-rescue aircraft to India. The plane, which has the capability to land on rough seas with waves of up to three meters and is suitable for long-range civilian and military applications, costs an estimated $110 million per unit.

India's navy is keen to acquire the amphibious aircraft and Japan is considering providing India low-interest loans to help it buy the expensive plane as it is eager to help India build a strong navy.

On April 1, the Abe Cabinet approved the relaxing of the principles and guidelines for weapons exports, ending a strict ban that had lasted nearly 50 years.

The sale of the US-2 amphibious aircraft will open up Japan's defence industry for additional contracts with foreign partners and stimulate Japan's defence industry.

Japan and India are also negotiating over a deal on nuclear energy cooperation.

The pact with India would give Japanese nuclear technology firms such as Toshiba Corp and Hitachi Ltd access to India's fast-growing market as they seek opportunities overseas to offset the anti-nuclear backlash at home in response to the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster.

India operates 20 mostly small reactors at six sites with a capacity of 4,780 megawatts, or 2 per cent of its total power capacity. The Indian government hopes to increase its nuclear capacity to 63,000 mW by 2032 by adding nearly 30 reactors.



The Abe Cabinet approved the relaxing of the principles and guidelines for weapons exports, ending a strict ban that had lasted nearly 50 years.

Modi has forged a special relationship with Japan and built personal rapport with Abe. When Abe returned to power, Modi broke diplomatic protocol and called to congratulate him despite the fact that he was chief minister of India's western state of Gujarat rather than a head of state.

Comparisons are frequently drawn between Abe and Modi. Modi is the first prime minister born after India gained independence in 1947. Abe is Japan's first prime minister born after World War II.

Modi and Abe are both assertive nationalists who came to power on platforms pledging economic revival and bolstering their countries' defence and strategic partnerships with like-minded states.

Abe, who has sought to build security options for Japan beyond the current US-centric framework, has argued that his country's ties with India hold "the greatest potential of any bilateral relationship anywhere in the world". Modi is seeking to strengthen economic and strategic cooperation with partners in East and Southeast Asia as part of his government's "Look East" strategy.

– CAI HONG
ANN/ China Daily