

Faced With 'Uncertain Times,' India and Japan Agree to Deepen Ties

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and JAVIER C. HERNÁNDEZ

NEW DELHI — The leaders of India and Japan announced an agreement on Thursday to expand their longstanding ties as they both seek greater stability and security in a world where the United States has become deeply unpredictable and China is asserting itself more aggressively.

The prime ministers, Narendra Modi of India and Sanae Takaichi of Japan, said after a meeting in New Delhi that they had signed agreements covering a broad range of their most urgent concerns, including energy self-reliance, security in the Indian and Pacific Oceans and artificial intelligence.

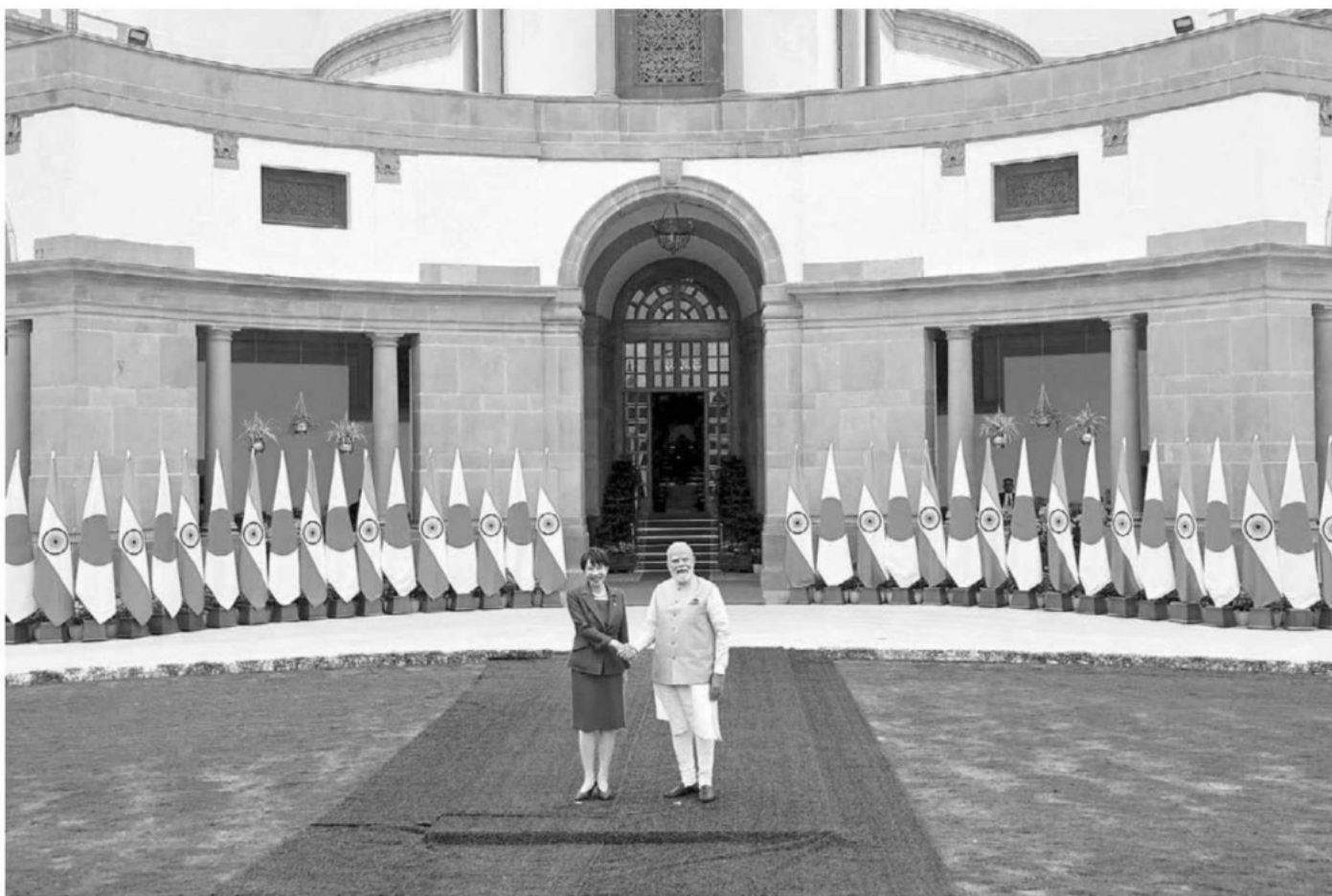
"We are starting a new chapter in our special strategic and global partnership," Mr. Modi said following the annual bilateral meeting, which took place at the prime minister's official guest residence, a former royal palace called Hyderabad House.

He characterized the agreement as a way the two nations — the world's fourth- and fifth-largest economies — can "strengthen regional peace, maritime security and rules-based order." India and Japan have carried out joint military exercises for years, and Japan is one of India's largest foreign investors.

Ms. Takaichi, who arrived in New Delhi on Wednesday for a three-day visit, her first to India as prime minister, said, "The most important thing is for Japan and India to leverage each other's strengths." The two leaders appeared at ease in each other's presence, with Mr. Modi at one point affectionately describing Ms. Takaichi as a "younger sister."

Though neither leader mentioned the United States, China or their respective leaders, Mr. Modi's reference to "uncertain times" needed little explanation.

Jeremy Peters reported from New Delhi, and Javier Hernández from Tokyo. Hari Kumar contributed reporting from New Delhi, and Kiuko Notoya from Tokyo.



ALTAF HUSSAIN/REUTERS

Prime Ministers Sanae Takaichi and Narendra Modi in New Delhi on Thursday. They signed economic and security agreements.

The decision by President Trump to start a war with Iran resulted in the shuttering of the Strait of Hormuz and the choking off of a considerable portion of the world's oil and gas supply.

Asian countries that import the vast majority of their oil from the Middle East were hit especially hard. Japan typically sources more than 90 percent of its oil from the region. As part of the agreements announced on Thursday, India and Japan will work more closely together to build up their strategic energy reserves and invest in maritime transport of those supplies.

India had been running perilously low on oil, having ex-

hausted nearly all of its reserves while the strait was closed. That caused fuel shortages across the country, adding another hardship in an economy already unsettled by Mr. Trump's tariffs and a weakening rupee.

China has long been another factor in boosting India-Japan ties. While India and China are on more stable terms lately after years of worsening relations and increased trade restrictions, Japan and China have entered a period of heightened tensions.

China has led an all-out effort in recent months to punish Japan over a remark by Ms. Takaichi, an outspoken critic of Beijing. In November, she told the Japanese

Parliament that a hypothetical Chinese attack on Taiwan could incite a military response from Tokyo. China, which considers Taiwan, a self-governed democracy, part of its territory, has responded by restricting exports of critical minerals to Japan; increasing military patrols; and discouraging tourism to Japan.

As she deals with Chinese pressure, Ms. Takaichi has worked to cultivate warm ties with Mr. Trump and to persuade the United States, its main ally, for security, to maintain its commitments in the region.

At the same time, Ms. Takaichi has sought to deepen alliances with other partners in Asia,

presenting Japan as a force for stability and strength in a region increasingly rattled by China's assertive posturing.

Ms. Takaichi's government recently reversed longstanding limits on the sale of Japan-made weapons overseas, and some experts have urged Tokyo to explore the possibility of exporting warships and defense technology to India. Japan is already in talks with Australia, the Philippines, Indonesia and other countries about defense exports.

Ms. Takaichi and Mr. Modi announced on Thursday that their defense and foreign ministers would meet later this year.