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■ Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Japanese Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi during a bilateral meeting in New Delhi yesterday.

Japan fighter jets ready for historic India debut

NEW DELHI AND TOKYO EXPAND STRATEGIC DEFENCE TIES

DUBAI

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Japanese fighter aircraft will visit India for the first time this year for a joint air exercise, marking a significant expansion of defence cooperation between the two countries as New Delhi and Tokyo deepen their strategic partnership across the Indo-Pacific.

The landmark deployment will take place during Veer Guardian 26, with Japan Air Self-Defence Force fighter aircraft flying to India to participate in the bilateral exercise.

The announcement came after Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his Japanese counterpart, Shinjiro Koizumi, met in New Delhi yesterday and agreed to expand military cooperation across sea, air and land.

Maritime cooperation

The two countries also signed a Memorandum of Arrangement on Maritime Security Cooperation, creating a framework for closer coordination between the Indian Navy and the Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force.

India and Japan agreed to strengthen coordination to protect vital sea lanes through naval ship visits, joint exercises, exchanges of personnel and experts, and logistical support —

INDIA-JAPAN DEFENCE PUSH

- **First fighter visit:** Japanese fighter aircraft will visit India for the first time for Veer Guardian 26.
- **Maritime pact:** New agreement covers maritime-domain awareness, search and rescue and disaster relief.
- **Naval access:** Cooperation will include use of ports and maintenance and repair facilities.
- **Shipbuilding:** Both countries will explore combining Japanese technology with India's Make in India production capabilities.
- **Defence technology:** India and Japan will advance the Unicorn shipborne communications project and other equipment programmes.
- **R&D:** India's Defence Research and Development Organisation and Japan's Acquisition, Technology & Logistics Agency will deepen cooperation in advanced defence technologies.
- **Special forces:** The two countries plan greater exchanges between their Special Operations Forces.
- **More complex drills:** Future exercises could incorporate unmanned systems and be organised at short notice.

including access to ports, maintenance and repair facilities.

The two ministers said such cooperation was important not only for India and Japan, but also for regional and international security.

Indo-Pacific focus

The agreements come as the two countries seek closer coordination amid heightened geopolitical tensions across the Indo-Pacific.

Singh and Koizumi strongly opposed unilateral actions that

impede freedom and safety of navigation and overflight, as well as attempts to change the status quo through force or coercion.

They reaffirmed their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific, describing their partnership as a pillar of peace, stability and prosperity in the region.

The two sides also agreed to explore deeper cooperation in naval shipbuilding, combining Japan's technological expertise with India's manufacturing capacity.

— With inputs from IANS and ANI