

India, Japan, U.S. stress keeping sea lanes open

Senior diplomats of India, Japan and the U.S. held the 9th trilateral meeting here on Wednesday, focussing on connectivity, counter-terrorism and other regional and global issues of common concern, a joint press release issued after the meeting, said.

“The officials reviewed the outcomes of the Trilateral Infrastructure Working Group that met in Washington in February and agreed to continue to collaborate to promote increased connectivity in the Indo-Pacific,” the press release said.

It said the talks drew from the guidelines laid out by the Foreign Ministers of the three nations who met in New York on September 18, 2017, on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly session.

Enhanced cooperation

“... the officials explored practical steps to enhance cooperation in the areas of connectivity and infrastructure development, counter-proliferation, counter-terrorism, maritime security, maritime domain awareness and HA-DR (Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief),” the press release said.

The meeting is crucial as it comes against the backdrop of the ongoing trade war between China and the Trump administration that erupted after both sides imposed tariffs on each other's goods. Echoing India's concern about maintaining freedom of navigation in the South China Sea and the western Pacific Ocean, the trilateral emphasised on importance of keeping the sea lanes open.

The U.S. was represented in Wednesday's talks by Alice Wells, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, and Susan Thornton, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. “All sides agreed to remain engaged and strengthen cooperation in support for a free, open, prosperous, peaceful and inclusive Indo-Pacific region through partnership with countries in the region,” the release said.

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