

Bilateral visits set to deepen ties between Japan and China

China and Japan appear set for a long-term engagement, based on a two-track approach, where Tokyo's decision to build its military muscle can be leveraged to negotiate with Beijing from a position of strength.

Japan's long-term strategy to bond with Beijing on the basis of parity was apparent in Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's address to Parliament, which convened for a 150-day session on Monday.

The *Nikkei Asian Review* reported that Mr. Abe reiterated Japan's readiness to push ahead with his "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy," which pursues stability and prosperity on the basis of an international rules-based order in the region.

The report highlighted that the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy policy was "originally" seen as aimed at addressing China's maritime assertiveness, signalling a shift in stance.

It added: "But (Mr.) Abe also said Japan will cooperate with Beijing to meet growing demand for building infrastructure in Asia, bearing in mind President Xi Jinping's "One Belt, One Road" cross-border infrastructure initiative".

Flow of trade

Diplomatic sources told *The Hindu* that in Japanese perception, the Indo-Pacific doctrine was not focused on China's so-called "containment". Instead it was an expression of anxiety regarding the uninterrupted flow of trade along important regional sea lanes.

Mr. Abe said Japan and China were "inseparable" countries.

Mr. Abe expressed his resolve to have reciprocal visits between him and Chinese President Xi Jinping "as soon as possible".

The sources said the process of reciprocal visits could begin with Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang's visit to Japan for a trilateral meeting of China, Japan and South Korea. That could be followed by a visit to China by Mr. Abe. Mr. Abe's arrival in Beijing would set the stage for President Xi's return visit to Japan.

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