

Tokyo for quadrilateral talks

One side less: The Malabar Exercise includes India, the U.S. and Japan, with Australia keen on joining it. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Citing growing international partnerships, India on Friday said it was “open” to working with partner countries for regional issues that are “relevant”. The comments from the External Affairs Ministry came after Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono declared in a media interview that Tokyo would call for a quadrilateral dialogue with Australia, India and the U.S.

“India is open to working with like-minded countries on issues that advance our interests and promote our viewpoint. We are not rigid in this regard. Because of our broad acceptability as a country, there are a number of such initiatives which are trilateral in nature. For example, we did the trilateral meeting with Russia and China on the topic of Asia-Pacific last year. We also do an India-Sri Lanka-Maldives trilateral on security matters,” Ministry spokesperson Raveesh Kumar said.

Chinese build-up

The official indicated that India was not alarmed about the regional situation especially in the context of reports about continued Chinese military build-up in the Doklam region.

Dismissing reports of a build-up on the contested plateau, Mr. Kumar said, “I would like to reiterate that there are no new developments at the face-off site and its vicinity since the August 28 disengagement.”

The Ministry’s reaction to the quadrilateral came days after the re-election of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, indicating that the new government is expected to push for overhauling of the post-World War strategic doctrine of Japan.

However, the comment indicated that such regional partnerships will have to suit Indian interests and said, “As far as we are concerned, we have an open mind to cooperate with countries with convergence but obviously on an agenda which is relevant to us.”

Significantly, Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar also indicated India’s willingness to work with Japan and the United States to deal with regional issues on Thursday.

Speaking at a think tank event, Mr. Jaishankar said U.S. investments in the power sector of Nepal will be in Indian interest, adding, “Regionalism will grow if there are higher comfort levels. Having Japanese or the Americans in room will be more helpful.”

Indications of regional partnership between India and Japan came also during Mr Abe’s visit, with both sides indicating willingness to manage the maritime domain from Indian Ocean and the Asia-Pacific zone.

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