

The Nation

Islamabad
31 January 2018

The China-Japan Diplomacy

Dr Ahmad Rashid Malik



The dawn of the 2018 would be a turning point in de-icing the strained relations between China and Japan . The ice is melted and ties are back on the track. The improvement would raise Sino-Japanese relationship to a new stage of cooperation and mutual trust.

The year marks the 40th anniversary of the signing of the China-Japan Treaty of Peace and Friendship. Since October last, the Sino-Japanese ties have been moving towards a positive trajectory. Many gulfs are being bridged and there is a mutual good-will to put the relations on a robust foundation after the exchange of political, legislative, and business delegations in the past couple of months. A trust is in the offing. The improvement of ties looks long-term and would have a positive impact on the Asia-Pacific's strategic relations in the coming years.

With the same spirit, Japanese Foreign Minister, Taro Kono, paid an official visit to Beijing on 27-28 January. Earlier, Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida visited Beijing in April 2016. This is Kono's first official visit to China after assuming his portfolio in August last. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held talks with Kono and exchanged opinions on bilateral ties and issues of common concerns.

This formal effort will re-assure the promotion of bilateral ties between the two countries after tense relations in the past seven years over the Island issue, known as Diaoyu in China and Senkaku in Japan . In another ruinous move, China rebuked Japan after it opened a museum for the disputed island in Tokyo on 25 January. The museum, run by the Japanese Government, displays documents and photographs defending Japan's claims over the island. The museum also displayed the photographs of the Takashima (in Japan) and Dokdo(in South Korea), an Island counter claimed by South Korea, inviting the anger from both China and South Korea ahead of the trilateral meeting to be held in Japan soon.

The settlement of the Island issue is the key in resolving bilateral trust between the two countries and it is hoped that Kono took this issue on his agenda with Wang. "I'm willing to promote cooperation and communication between Japan and China in all areas while properly addressing outstanding problems", Kono remarked ahead of visit to Beijing.

Similarly, "China hopes that Japan does not slacken its efforts and puts its words into action, and works with China to get ties back onto a normal, healthy track as soon as possible", Wang said. Kono's visit will lay down the ground for Prime Minister's Shinzo Abe's visit to China .

Japan is also willing to work with China on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) under the international standards, openness, and free atmosphere. It is assumed that soon Japan would be an active player on the BRI. Kono said that Japan and China cooperating to address the immense needs for infrastructure in Asia would bring great benefits to the economy of both countries as well as to the prosperity of Asia. While addressing the National Diet, Abe also said that Japan will cooperate with Beijing to meet the growing demand for building infrastructure in Asia, bearing in mind President Xi Jinping's "One Belt, One Road" cross-border infrastructure initiative."

Abe said that Japan and China were "inseparable," countries, adding that Japan "will seek to meet the expectations of the international community by developing friendly relations (with China) in a stable manner." Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Hua Chunying, on 23 January said, "With the principle of wide consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, China stands ready to work with Japan and other

parties to promote the Belt and Road Initiative and achieve common development and prosperity of countries in this region.”

Being the second and third largest economies of the world, China and Japan could inject a new vigour in the BRI's infrastructure projects, trade connectivity across Asia, Africa, and Eurasia.

There is also an upcoming trilateral meeting to be held in Japan between China , South Korea, and Japan . Kono also discussed the issue with his counterpart in Beijing. It is hoped that the museum issue of the disputed Islands with China and South Korea might not sabotage the convening of the trilateral meeting. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's would be expected to take part in the meeting.

During Kono's visit to Beijing, there were discussions on the North Korean nuclear and missile program. Japan wants China to pass on strict measures against North Korean nuclear and missile program. However, under the inter-Korean peace talks, a much better room would be available to decrease differences on the issue.

In spite of increasing enthusiasm between China and Japan , there is yet an obscurity about a number of fundamental issues as they keep un-surfacing over and again. It would take some time to see how Tokyo would be accommodating the inter-Korean peace talks, and at the same time, how it would improve relations with Seoul, and a new beginning with Beijing, as these issues are highly interwoven.

The writer is Director of the China-Pakistan Study Center at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad. He writes on East Asian affairs.

<https://nation.com.pk/31-Jan-2018/the-china-japan-diplomacy>