

Japan resumes refueling mission

by UPI

TOKYO -- Japan Thursday resumed its refueling mission to support U.S.-led anti-terrorism activities in the Indian Ocean after a three-month halt, reports said. The 4,550-ton Murasame, the Maritime Self-Defense Force's destroyer, sailed off from Yokosuka, south of Tokyo, for the Indian Ocean to join another MSDF support ship to resume refueling activities beginning next month, Kyodo news reported. The mission is designed to support the U.S. fight against terrorism in and near Afghanistan. Japanese Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba said the resumption of the mission is "indispensable for Japan to fulfill its duty in the international community" and help make Afghanistan more stable, the report said. The resumption was made possible under a special law the government of Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda fought hard to push through parliament after the previous mission expired in November. Under the new law, valid for one year, the fuel and water provided by the Japanese ships can be used only for Afghan-related missions and cannot be diverted for other U.S. operations such as in Iraq. The Kyodo report said more than 100 peace activists held rallies to protest the resumption of the refueling mission.

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