



# INDO-PACIFIC CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

#01/2022/April-June, 2022

## Indo-Pacific in a Nutshell

The Indo-Pacific Civil Society Forum (IPCSF) is an informal coalition of civil society organisations (NGOs, think tanks, etc.) working across the region toward realising a shared vision of peace, security, stability, and prosperity.

<https://cuts-wdc.org/indo-pacific-forum.htm>

### Long Live Abe *San*

Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was assassinated on July 08, 2022, while campaigning for his party in the Japanese city of Nara.

Abe, in 2007, gave a speech on his first visit to India outlining his vision of the "confluence of two seas" (*futatsu no umi no majiwari*) between the Indian and Pacific oceans, which would come to lay the groundwork for the "a stable, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific region" concept later adopted by many countries in the region.

He is also widely regarded as an architect of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), which began as an informal grouping in the wake of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and was later retooled as a regional informal alliance.



### What is the Point of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework?

President Joe Biden unveiled the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) in Tokyo on May 23, 2022.

In addition to United States of America (USA), a dozen countries, including economic heavyweights like Australia, India, Japan and New Zealand, were signatories at the launch (Fiji joined a few days later). Seven out of ten members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) participated in its launch.

**The idea is to promote four pillars:** boosting trade, especially of the digital kind; making supply chains more resilient; tackling climate change through clean energy; and fighting corruption in business. Even if IPEF does not immediately or eventually result in a trade deal, there is value in being at the table when regional trading structures and new standards are being discussed.

It is also useful to have another venue to speak regularly to USA, especially for leaders of smaller countries that lack such opportunities. Nor do they want to send USA a signal that they are uninterested in talking. The most optimistic way of looking at the initiative is by setting high standards on emissions, decarbonisation, the digital economy, tax collection, corruption and so on, all agreed to by several big Asian economies. IPEF creates an environment that makes its members more attractive to USA's investment.

(TE, 09.06.22)

### INSIDE

- Accelerating Cross-border Paperless Trade **2**
- Quad Leaders Launch STEM Fellowship Programme **3**
- Members' News **4**

## Accelerating Cross-border Paperless Trade

Countries started implementing the first United Nations agreement dedicated entirely to accelerating cross-border trade digitalisation at the first session of the Paperless Trade Council, convened in Bangkok, Thailand under the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) auspices.

The Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific is a UN treaty developed by ESCAP member States to accelerate the implementation of digital trade facilitation measures for trade and development.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has seriously disrupted global supply chains and accentuated the importance of international trade as a key means of implementation of sustainable development," said Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP. (ESCAP, 27.04.22)



## EU-India Supply Chain in the Indo-Pacific

The globalised economic world order has promulgated a widespread cause-and-effect impact. Securing global supply chains to limit the adverse effect of the Ukraine crisis will therefore be the need of the hour.

The supply chains are a focus under the EU's Global Gateway, which was introduced in 2021 and has swiftly become a cornerstone for implementing the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy.

Similarly, India also devotes itself to creating policies to cater the supply chain sustainability and resilience through multilateral initiatives like Australia-Japan-India-led Supply Chain Resilience.

But it is not advisable to limit the supply chain cooperation to a handful of actors. Therefore, a practical broad-based collaboration between India and the EU, alongside like-minded regional partners, can help ensure that the supply chains are not made more vulnerable. (ISDP, 01.04.22)

## RCEP is Transforming Trade in Asia Pacific

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) will create new trade opportunities among Asian countries and accelerate the region's economic recovery.

The agreement will eliminate tariffs on more than 90 per cent of goods over the next 10 to 15 years and introduce investment and intellectual property rules to promote free trade.

The RCEP covers about 30 per cent of the world's population, the global gross domestic product (GDP), and worldwide trade. It will create Asia-based supply chains for trade. (TR, 04.04.22)

## How Central is ASEAN Centrality?

The churn in global politics has meant several things – distaste for, and growing irrelevance of, traditional multilateralism, new plurilateral formations that focus on focused interests, and traditional norms of trade and investment upended by new realities.

Geopolitics plays a bigger role in geo-economics. Despite the Russia-Ukraine war and a lease of life to the Euro-Atlantic idea, the Indo-Pacific is by far the most consequential geo-strategic concept in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the Quad at its core. "ASEAN centrality" is ritually trotted out by all countries within the Indo-Pacific.

ASEAN's Outlook stresses it, describing ASEAN centrality as the "underlying principle for promoting cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region." (ToI, 22.06.22)

## Towards an Asian Digital Trade Zone

Digital single markets permit consumers and businesses to engage across national borders and reduce capital costs. Regulatory integration and a digital trade zone are required to achieve a single digital market.

Many Asian countries are reluctant to liberalise digital trade for two major reasons. First, its impact on customs duties; second, it protects the local enterprises.

Some Asian countries have moved towards more significant digital trade but simultaneously erect barriers to others. (EAF, 19.06.22)

## Sharing Maritime Domain Awareness

One of the substantive new initiatives to emerge from the Quad Summit 2022 is the idea of shared maritime domain awareness.

For that, the Quad launched an Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) to develop and disseminate a real-time integrated picture of the activity across the vast Indo-Pacific theatre that will help the coastal states gain greater control over their waters.

This initiative will help monitor legal and illegal shipping activities, combat IUU, and enhance the disaster management capabilities of the Quad.

*(ISAS, 03.06.22)*

## Establishing Chinese Naval Base in Cambodia

China is suspected of building a Cambodian naval base, which raises concerns about its military footprint in the South China Sea. Establishing a Chinese naval base in Cambodia would boost China's aspirations of becoming a global power with a network of military facilities worldwide.

In practical terms, a Cambodia base will allow China to deploy its warships and coastguard vessels at short notice around the region rather than sail them over long distances during which their movements can be tracked and countered. In addition, logistics and intelligence monitoring would be enhanced by easier access to Southeast Asian sea lanes like the vital Straits of Malacca.

*(Time, 07.06.22)*

## Evolving India-Vietnam Bilateral Ties

The three-day visit to Hanoi by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh underscored the evolving nature of India-Vietnam bilateral ties. India's relationship with Vietnam has transformed from their millennia-old civilisational and cultural linkages to geopolitics, prodding robust defence-centric partnerships.

Guided by their civilisational values, both believe in socialising and restraining China's behaviour by engaging with it and not confronting or alienating it altogether. This is what promises to see the India-Vietnam axis emerging as a novel alternative locomotive of change in evolving realignments in the Indo-Pacific region.

This rapidly strengthening bilateral partnership portends far-reaching implications for the larger Indo-Pacific region.

*(AT, 10.06.22)*

## Challenges for Colombo Security Conclave

The Colombo Security Conclave (CSC) is a regional maritime security grouping of India, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Mauritius members and Bangladesh and Seychelles observers. The conclave focused on maritime safety and security, terrorism and radicalisation, cybersecurity, and humanitarian aid and disaster relief.

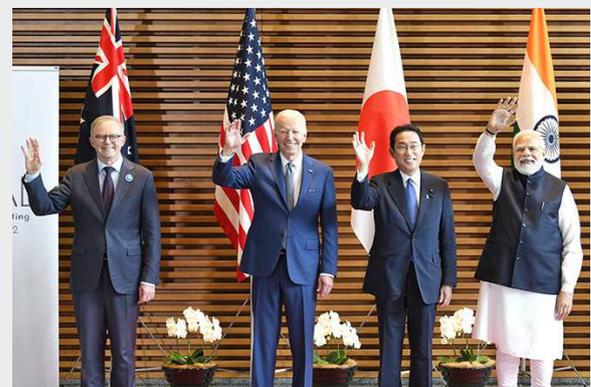
This sub-regional arrangement is seen as strategic outreach to Indian Ocean states to develop cooperative mechanisms against shared strategic and security threats. However, structural asymmetry, domestic politics in member states, and a lack of strategic coordination will create challenges in sustaining the longevity of the mini-lateral.

Nevertheless, the CSC is a noteworthy advancement to structure cooperation amongst littoral states on maritime safety and security.

*(TD, 15.04.22)*

## Quad Leaders Launch STEM Fellowship Programme

Quad Members launched the Quad fellowship programme on the margins of the Tokyo Summit. The first-of-its-kind scholarship programme aims to bring together students from Quad countries to pursue degrees at leading US Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) graduate universities.



The programme expects to encourage academic excellence and promote people-to-people linkages between the four countries.

*(HT, 24.05.22)*

## Australia Risk Policy Institute



The ARPI is formed to promote and encourage the strategic risk policy in leadership, decision-making, and management. It works on policies and legislation from a risk-based perspective and advocates for government and private stakeholders to ensure those issues are effectively addressed.

Besides, ARPI's research reaches on global social media regulation, implications of virtual nations, and the development of 'IA' or Intelligence Augmentation.

<https://www.arpi.org.au/>

## Centre for Policy Alternatives



The CPA was formed to strengthen institutions and capacity-building for good governance and conflict transformation in Sri Lanka.

The CPA's research focuses on a policy-oriented analysis of the political and social situation of Sri Lanka and proactive engagement for conflict transformation and peace-building with the aim of democratic governance and peace.

<https://www.cpalanka.org/>

## Forum for Integrated National Security



The FINS is a platform for experts to share their perceptions and ideas with civil society. The FINS research comprises maritime, defence, space, nuclear, and other relevant security issues. It promotes the concept of an integrated national security approach in their R&D rather than the reactionary approach. Besides, they strive to promote the strategic culture through articles, events, and other deliverables.

<https://finsindia.org/>

## Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis



KIPPR conducts objective research and analysis on government, economic, social, trade, environment and health issues to provide quality public policy advice to the government. It conducted the Annual Regional Conference, themed "Foundations for a sustainable economic transformation in Kenya".

The conference discussed creative economy, green economy, trade competitiveness and frontier products, the gig economy and digital transformation, financial inclusion, values and economic transformation, human capital, and making markets work.

<https://kippra.or.ke/>

## Information Technology and Innovation Foundation



The ITIF address critical issues on technological innovation and public policy. The Foundation discuss with policymakers in five continents by presenting data analyses and proposals to advance effective innovation policies and oppose counterproductive ones.

The ongoing research programmes emphasise setting the policy agenda on technology, innovation, and global competition issues and advising policymakers. ITIF also shapes public debate by hosting events and providing official testimony, op-eds, and issue analysts.

<https://itif.org/>

## Institute of South Asian Studies

The ISAS was established in July 2004 and is dedicated to research on contemporary South Asia. Its research primarily concentrates on international relations and multilateralism, society and governance, trade and economics, emerging technologies, south-Asian diaspora, sustainability, and the environment.



<https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/>

*\*Members profile will be updated in future editions.*

Sources: AT: Asia Times; EAF: EastAsiaForum; ESCAP: Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; IISS: International Institute for Strategic Studies; ISAS: Institute of South Asian Studies; ISDP: Institute for Security & Development Policy; TD: The Diplomat; TE: The Economist; TI: The Interpreter; TR: Thomson Reuters; WB: World Bank