

Reports

on

Asian Relations Conference IV

on

'Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific Region: Asian Perspectives'

at

**Sapru House, New Delhi
21-22 March, 2013**

INTRODUCTION

The Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) and Association of Asia Scholars (AAS) organised the Fourth Asian Relations Conference (ARC IV) on 21-22 March 2013 at Sapru House, New Delhi. The theme of the Conference was 'Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific Region: Asian Perspectives'. There were twenty-four participants from 12 countries including India.

DAY 1 :

INAUGURAL SESSION

Prof. Swaran Singh, President of AAS gave welcome remarks. He elaborated on the growing importance of maritime security, and India's increasing foray into the Indian Ocean and beyond. Prof Singh enumerated the significance of geopolitics in determining the relationship among countries.

Ambassador Rajiv K Bhatia, Director General, ICWA, delivered the inaugural address. Ambassador Bhatia, noted about the shared history of Asian states, quoting Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister and the architect of the first Asian Relations Conference, he remarked about transformation trends among Asia countries, and the appropriateness of the conference theme chosen to commemorate, celebrate and strengthen the 'deeper urge' about Asia. He observed that the time was ripe for a holistic appraisal of the geo-strategic trends in the Indo-Pacific region.

Emphasising the cultural and civilisational linkages among the Asian states, Ambassador provided a historical and conceptual perspective of the term 'Indo-Pacific'. The term 'Indo-Pacific' was still in its infancy, although it was becoming more acceptable among strategic community. Whilst some prefer using Indo-Pacific, others argue that it was inadequate. According to Ambassador Bhatia the term 'Indo-Pacific' meant that "multifaceted globalisation has ensured that developments from the Suez Canal to the Sea to Japan or from African shores of the Indian Ocean to the western Pacific were strongly interrelated and mutually dependent. Therefore, the new spatial concept 'Indo-Pacific' could be a useful tool to understand the geopolitics of the 21st century".

The conference underlined the intrinsic significance of the region by highlighting: maritime dimension of inter-state relations; platform to examine political priorities, economic interests and security perspectives. In this context, the shift of power from west to east, the US pivot towards Asia, rebalancing or even a newer edition of the policy approach and strategic responses from ASEAN, Japan, Australia and others would be appraised. Further, it would help us move away

from older cartographic imaginations of Indian and Pacific Oceans and bridge the two oceans to encourage the idea of 'confluence of the seas'.

The oceanic linkages moulded India through the millennia, and its commercial, cultural and civilisational exchanges with the regions east, south and west of India flourished through sea routes. Moreover, IOR-ARC's commitment has deepened, and the 'Look East' policy in its third decade has considerable substance and momentum. There was definitely a realisation of the centrality of ASEAN, and the march towards building the ASEAN Community by 2050. Ambassador Bhatia reminded delegates that Dr Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India, had stressed on India-ASEAN and Indo-Pacific engagement, which has strengthened over time. He expressed hope that the intellectual fiesta during the two days of this conference would lead to a meaningful dialogue and deepen the understanding of the region.

SESSION I: Indo-Pacific Region as a Spatial Concept

Ambassador Sudhir T. Devare, chaired the first session, and shared various perspectives of the discourses on the Indo-Pacific region. Ambassador Devare talked about the deeper and fast growing connectedness in the Indo-Pacific region. Ambassador K.V. Bhagirath, Secretary General, Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC), emphasised on the increasing linkages between Indo-Pacific Region and the IOR-ARC. He noted that the centre of the world economic gravity was shifting towards the Indo-Pacific Region, which brought together the three continents of Asia, Australia and Africa. However, he cautioned that despite the promising opportunities in the region, there were daunting challenges.

Ambassador Bhagirath stressed that the Indian Ocean region was of tremendous geo-strategic importance, and characterised by abundance of resources, minerals, oil, natural gas, etc. While economic partnerships have grown in strength, geo-politics remained fluid. The Indian Ocean region was more stable than the Pacific Ocean region. He observed that regionalism has restated patterns of the past. IOR-ARC, headquartered in Mauritius saw its unique formation in the 1990s, covering South Africa in the west to Australia in the east. There was a common ground for regional partnerships with India taking over as chair in 2011, and Australia 2013, and Indonesia would be the next vice-chair. Thus, the fulcrum of the IOR-ARC would move to the Asian region. Priority in this vast region was on sustainability as well as making IOR-ARC a regional community. Ambassador Bhagirath expressed the possibility of a greater economic and strategic system as was being envisioned. This was especially relevant as the Indo-Pacific region which accounts for two-thirds of total oceanic space.

Prof. Michimi Muranushi, University of Gakushuin, Tokyo, using an interesting methodology, spoke on 'Regions as Networks', and asserted that 'regions' should be seen not only as

geographical divisions but also as changing networks of nations. He used the networks of twenty countries including India, China, Russia, the US and Japan for the past decade, and explained how they overlapped. He analysed and compared the degree of relatedness among the twenty states by using the data of 'World News Connection', published by the US.

Based on this methodology, Prof. Muranushi observed that China had been well connected over the last two decades with almost all the countries. He took certain areas such as trade, investment, tourism, migration, delegation, communication, disputes, etc. to identify the states that played a central role in the bilateral/multilateral relations. He explained the gradual shift of relations over time, and suggested future trends of the networks. He concluded by emphasising on the growth of China and India as more influential states, and thus, the concept of network in their case was more important than their geography. Prof. Muranushi was optimistic that in future there would be more opportunities for other states to cooperate and coordinate their actions.

In his presentation on 'The Emerging Vistas of the Indo Pacific', Dr Lawrence Prabhakar, Associate Professor, Madras Christian College, Chennai, provided a theoretical orientation to the concept of the Indo-Pacific region and outlined some policy choices for India. He drew attention to seven broad approaches to the idea of Indo-Pacific - constructivist, balance of power, power shift, strategic autonomy choices, concert of democracies, Indo-Pacific regionalism and Indo-Pacific commons. Dr Lawrence noted that the great powers, particularly the US, resorted to two strategies: 'hub and spokes' and 'regional pivot' in the Indo-Pacific region. In response, China's counter strategies in the region involved soft balancing, internal balancing, asymmetric military strategy and encouragement of brinkmanship actors like North Korea. On the Indian front, its economic engagement and security participation was evident in the various bilateral treaties and arrangements that it has entered into with Southeast Asia, China, Japan, South Korea and the United States. India's gradual increase in size, and the frequency of its warship dispatches, and complexity of the naval exercises with the Pacific powers such as Japan and South Korea have raised India's benchmark as a regional power.

SESSION II: Indo-Pacific Region: Perspectives from Indian Ocean

Commodore (Retd.) C. Uday Bhaskar, National Maritime Foundation, chaired the second session. Dr Hoseana B. Lunogelo, the Executive Director of the Economic and Social Research Foundation, Tanzania, dwelt on the African and Indian Ocean perspectives for technical cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. He emphasised on the importance of the Indian Ocean, especially linking Africa with India. Dr Lunogelo reiterated the necessity for more engagements between countries around the Indo-Pacific region in the field of agriculture, natural resources, migration, investments, piracy, security, etc. He stated that "Africa was one of the countries

blessed with many natural and sustainable resources. As part of the Indo-Pacific region, it had much to offer. However, without collaboration between nation states, it was impossible to attain the desired success". He posited that African geopolitics in the Indian Ocean region had been driven by four factors: Africa's historical connections with Asia; emergence of lawless societies; growth of migrating population; and the discovery of huge stocks of non-renewable sources on-shore and off-shore.

Ambassador Noellie Alexander, former Seychelles Ambassador, reiterated the key role of the Indo-Pacific region for the island nation. Though Seychelles might not be as big as other countries in geographical size, she encouraged other countries to participate with them in activities that would be mutually beneficial for growth. She added that "Seychelles however has a number of piracy related problems that needed attention. For this, the country alone could not fight single-handedly and needed help from external sources". Ambassador Alexander focussed on integration of the Indo-Pacific region in complete sense, which could lead to a win-win situation for all concerned parties through economic development along with sustainable growth.

Commodore (Retd.) M. R. Khan, Senior Fellow, Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS), put forth the genealogy of links between Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Indo-Pacific region. Commodore Khan pointed out the importance of the Gulf region since the days of ancient empires when seas were the only means of transportation. The region had some of the fastest growing economies in the world due to their oil and natural gas reserves, and as a result, partnership between countries around the gulf region with that of the Indo-Pacific countries had increased significantly. He weaved a historical trajectory of the Gulf region since the 17th century till date.

SESSION III: Indo-Pacific Region: Perspectives from South East and East Asia

Professor Madhu Bhalla, Department of East Asian Studies, University of Delhi, chaired the third session that deliberated on the Southeast and East Asian perspectives on the Indo-Pacific region. Prof. Bhalla spoke of the usefulness of the concept.

Ms Melissa H. Conley Tyler, Director, Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA), Deakin, Australia pointed out that there has been a resurgence of Indo-Pacific as a strategic concept in Australian security and foreign policy choices. She opined that there were a range of internal as well as external factors that have driven this re-emergence of the Indo-Pacific concept. The most important internal factor was the growing coal driven economy of Western Australia. On the external front, the key drivers were the rise of India and China; increased trade between the two oceans; and increased strategic alignments throughout Asia. In the Indo-Pacific,

Australia had the onus of observing caution, institution building, taking practical steps and forging alliances.

Ms Sumathy Permal, Senior Researcher, Maritime Institute of Malaysia (MIMA), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia analysed the relevance of the Indo-Pacific region for smaller states like Malaysia. She defined Indo-Pacific as the maritime space between the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific that goes beyond the Asia-Pacific. Ms Permal highlighted the growing strategic, economic and military importance of the Indo-Pacific region. However, Malaysia as a small state was yet to totally incorporate the idea of Indo-Pacific. Malaysia's interests, in the India Ocean, were mainly associated with the guarantee of freedom of navigation for international shipping through the approaches to the Malacca Straits. After outlining the newness of the Indo-Pacific as a concept, Ms Permal recognised the role of rising powers like India and China, and maritime powers such as the US, big military nations like France in intensifying the geopolitical dynamics of the region.

Ms Chan Git Yin, Research Fellow, Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, emphasised the importance of the relationship between ASEAN and the Indo-Pacific region, laying down the trends in the maritime domain. The new geographical construct of Indo-Pacific was basically widening the concept of Asia Pacific to include the Indian Ocean. She elaborated four reasons for preferring the term Indo-Pacific over Asia Pacific. These were economic connectivity, maritime links, oil supply and trade links. However, it inherited a fair share of problems and challenges from the Asia-Pacific region like border issues, crime, overlapping maritime disputes etc. Indian Ocean Region in the backdrop also intensified strategic and political attention. According to Ms Chan, the Indian Ocean Region should be as strong and linked as the ASEAN, which also had strong links with India, a major strategic and regional powers in the region.

SPECIAL SESSION

In his Keynote Address, Mr Salman Khurshid, Hon'ble External Affairs Minister, India, elaborated the history of the Asian Relations Conference, which Pundit Nehru initiated in 1947; the era marked the beginning of intellectual, political, social, economic and cultural resurgence of the continent. He emphasised that over six decades the centre of gravity of global economy and politics had shifted to Asia, and it was natural to revisit the vision and see its applicability in this modern age. Mr Khurshid spoke about the concept of Indo-Pacific as a logical extension of India's Look East policy. Underscoring the importance of the role played by ASEAN countries, he spoke essentially about the broad spectrum of the Look East policy which immensely helped improve India's relations with its neighbours. However, he also drew attention towards the

danger of federalising Indian foreign policy. He reiterated his faith in Pundit Nehru's vision of a united Asia, Non-Aligned movement and the doctrine of Panchsheel.

He stressed on the relevance of the theme of the Conference in various areas like maritime security, trade and economic development, disaster management, tourism promotion and so on. He reaffirmed his faith in diplomacy as the most potent weapon of foreign policy. Mr Khurshid said that the 'Indo-Pacific region' could also be viewed as a spatial concept wherein the strengths and complementarities of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean were in full play. Oceans neither begin nor end at any particular point; they connect and interact with each other creating numerous possibilities and opening new horizons. The world is going through an exciting era, where the Indian and Pacific Oceans meet and the countries and people on its rim have embarked in the pursuit of a new paradigm of peace, prosperity and stability. He proposed an innovative idea of setting up an Indian Ocean University, in the Indo-Pacific region, where courses on maritime security would be given greater attention.

The External Affairs Minister spoke briefly about the role of India in the 'Indo-Pacific Region'. Conceptually, from India's perspective, the concept of 'Indo-Pacific' could be looked upon as a natural corollary of the country's modern version of 'Look East Policy', which has contributed to expanding and deepening of India's traditional relations with Southeast and East Asia and beyond, and increasing the country's interests and presence beyond the Malacca Straits. India's relations with China have expanded multi-fold, making the country India's largest trade partner in merchandise goods. Relations with Japan and Republic of Korea have deepened with Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements (CEPA) being established with both countries. India was indeed, the largest recipient of Japanese Official Development Assistance (ODA), and Japan was making significant investments in India. These economic relationships have acquired a deeper significance with the establishment of strategic partnerships.

DAY-2

SESSION IV - Indo-Pacific Region: Perspectives from the US, Russia and the EU

Ambassador Sheelkant Sharma, former Secretary-General, SAARC, chaired the fourth session, and remarked on the contrasting perspectives on the Indo-Pacific concept from three global powers, US, Russia and the EU.

Lt. Gen (Retd.) Daniel Leaf, Director, Asia-Pacific Centre for Strategic Studies, Hawaii, argued that it was 'fallacious' to presume that the US was balancing China in a conventional sense of the term; -While there might be anxieties in the conduct of inter-state relations and general politics of the region but it was 'ridiculous' to contemplate the military containment of China, owing to

its size and strength". He categorically rejected that a new Cold War was in the offing as there were no major ideological differences. The US sought to promote peace, stability and prosperity in the region, and though military dimension was significant, dialogue and partnerships, especially in economic, maritime trade and security issues, were the preferred terms for the US to steer relationships in the region. To this end, the US emphasised building capacities of its friends and partners and relied upon cooperative relations in managing Indo-Pacific affairs. The Indian and Pacific Oceans have emerged as one of the strategic arcs of trade and investment and energy supplies with the potential for future competition and cooperation. The US believed that the nations, who benefit from stability in the Indo-Pacific region, have a role in maintaining the system from which they have benefitted.

Dr Yevgeny Alexandrovich Kanaev, Lead Researcher, Moscow State Institute of International Affairs (MGIMO), Moscow, highlighted the aspect of major economic and strategic imbalances in the Indo-Pacific region. Dr Kanaev underscored the failures of Sino-US leadership in establishing peace, harmony and equity in the region. While multilateral processes have increased, issues have become complicated, the approach and substance of dialogue have been stagnant and conservative. He appreciated India's increasing prominence in the region in correcting those imbalances, particularly on development goals, mechanisms and institutions.

Russia had much convergence with India's policies in the region, like energy security, dispute resolution through legal and political means, averting polarisation of the region etc., and it strove to complement its efforts in maintaining a sustained, inclusive growth in the region. Dr Kanaev argued that the aggravating imbalances in the Asia-Pacific development aims, mechanisms and institutions, a more active Indian participation in the Indo-Pacific region would help maintaining a high level of economic growth in several parts of the world, including in the Russian Federation. Thereby, the discourse on the Indo-Pacific region and deliberations on the same was a welcome development.

Professor Joachim Krause, Chair for International Relations, Aspen Institute, University of Kiel, Berlin, presented the perspective of Germany in particular, and the European Union in general over the Indo-Pacific region. Prof. Krause outlined the major stake the EU had in the Indo-Pacific region, ranging from maritime trade to energy security to access to raw materials and consumer markets. Over 60 per cent of trade of Asia-Pacific countries was linked to the EU, and thereby security of sea lanes of communication became a high priority for the EU. Thus, turbulent zones like Hormutz Straits, Suez Canal, Horn of Africa and South China Sea assumed significance, and the EU proposed a multilateral framework for resolving conflicts to enable uninterrupted trade. Agreed rules, shared principles and converging norms would help better manage the disputes, and the EU experience would provide a model for emulation. Prof. Krause pointed out the inadequacies of institutional cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, and argued for cooperative security solutions to security problems. The term Indo-Pacific' was gaining more

relevance for Europeans in the field of international trade, and Europe saw itself as a beneficiary in the long run. He concluded that for European security, the stability in the Indo-Pacific states was of extreme significance, and Europe was interested in assisting Asian states in devising regional cooperative solutions to security problems.

Summing up the session, Chair Ambassador Sheel Kant Sharma described the Indo-Pacific region as a cusp of change, where much economic and strategic dynamism was anticipated to take ground in the future. This theatre shall see all major powers jostling for influence and footprint in the region, and yet would exude hope that dialogue and cooperation would prevail over confrontation and dominance.

SESSION V: India and the Indo-Pacific Region

Dr C. Raja Mohan, Head, Strategic Studies Programme, Observer Research Foundation, chaired the fifth session, which witnessed an intense debate on the prospects of India's role in the Indo-Pacific region; the challenges and limitations it faced; and the instruments it had deployed to further its interests in the region.

Ambassador Hemant Krishan Singh argued that China posed a major challenge for India, which had re-positioned itself both as a continental and a maritime power. A self-confident power, China was unenthusiastic on multilateral processes and sought to promote a hierarchical system, where it occupied the apex position. India ought to respond to China by strengthening its multilateral ties with ASEAN, EAS and US-Japan axis, and to compel China to become more accommodative to the interests of all regional powers. Ambassador Singh emphasised that the fundamental change that had been witnessed in the recent past was the inclusion of India in the regional discourse on emerging Asia, which began with its participation in the inaugural East Asia Summit in 2005. He suggested that India should be proactive in delivering public goods, including security, and realise its untapped economic potential by reinvigorating its 'Look East' policy, establish infrastructural connectivity in the region and promote institutional partnerships with all stakeholders. Ambassador Singh concluded by stressing that India had to adjust to the continual transformation by re-positioning itself both as a continental and a maritime power, and its geographical location had given it a unique position in shaping regional economic progress and security.

Professor Swaran Singh, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, India, argued that Sino-Indian rivalry was over-hyped, whereas prominent zones of conflicts involving China vis-a-vis Taiwan, Vietnam, US and Russia were understated. The US was enticing India, and India was leveraging the US against China, as seen in their recent strategic partnership, have made China suspicious of India's intentions. However, there was enough scope for both India and

China to rise simultaneously. Moreover, engaging China was not a matter of choice for India, considering the asymmetrical relationship that existed between the two countries.

Dr Vijay Sakhuja, Director (Research), ICWA, endeavoured to deconstruct the concept of Indo-Pacific. He pointed out that Indo-Pacific as a spatial concept was still in its infancy, has not entered into official lexicon, and required critical examination before becoming a useful categorisation for policy analysis. While the huge economic potential, especially maritime trade was self-evident, it remained uncertain as to whether an overarching Indo-Pacific framework would be feasible to resolve all outstanding issues, ranging from sovereign disputes to piracy to facilitating trade. Dr Sakhuja opined that sub-regionalism amongst actors and organisations would serve as a better alternative instead of a large single integrated institution, at least in the near term.

Commander Raghavendra Mishra, Research Fellow, National Maritime Foundation (NMF), outlined the various dimensions of geo-economics and geo-strategies of the Indo-Pacific region seen through India's lens. He argued that shift in the Indian strategic thinking had transformed the maritime domain from a traditional frontier and barrier to be protected to an enabling medium facilitating dynamic economic interactions. However, India remained ill-equipped in civilian infrastructure like ports, while increasing capabilities on the military front. Cdr. Mishra suggested that the policy had to be transformed to a more functional partnership oriented policy to utilise the opportunities thrown open by globalisation, interconnectedness and interdependence amongst societies and states.

Dr C. Raja Mohan concluded the session by observing that geographies were unfixed entities, but were dynamic concepts, responding to emerging political scenarios. He advocated that not to get obsessed with 'words and grammar' of language, but look into broader contexts and evolving scenarios. New actors operating in new frameworks mature over a period of time and must be given a fair trial to experiment with their policies rather than prematurely judging them.

SESSION VI: Prospects for Economic Integration

Ambassador Amar Nath Ram chaired the last session, which discussed the prospects of economic integration in the Indo-Pacific region.

Mr Asanga Abeyagoonasekara, Executive Director, Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute of International Relations and Strategic Studies (LKIIRS), Colombo, argued that with deepening financial crisis in the West, there had been a shift from 'Crisis in North' to 'Resurgent South', taking place through the Indo-Pacific region. The economic integration in the Indo-Pacific region would provide stability and increase inter-dependence. India, China, Japan, Australia and the US

were key players in the Indo-Pacific region. The economic cooperation could offer a viable solution to the geo-political rivalries in Asia. Further, Sri Lanka's increasing integration with India through the Indo-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement would help enter into Indian supply chains. The expanding export markets, flow of information, communication, and investment in education, technology, research and development in Sri Lanka could create access for foreign markets into the Indo-Pacific region.

Dr Zhu Cuiping, Deputy Director, Regional Institute for Indian Ocean Economics (RIIOE), Yunnan University, Kunming, China, pointed out that economic integration was the first and foremost pre-requisite for regional integration. Dr Cuiping observed that globalisation could change the world from MAD (Mutual Assured Destruction) to MED (Mutual Economic Dependence). She conceded the important role India assumed in integrating the two oceans. But, the relations of main stakeholders, especially Sino-India ties were crucial for any integration of the Indo-Pacific region. As a concept, the Indo-Pacific region is structuring regional relationships, minimising regional insecurity and maximising economic cooperation which could lead to a win-win situation.

Ms Melissa Conley Tyler gave an overview of the two-day conference with certain concluding comments. She stated that the region was in a time of change and in the Indo-Pacific realm, each country had varied needs, ranging from survival, to development, from economic integration to conflict. The three big issues in the region were: China-US, India-China and conflict triggers in that power play. However, in this context, it was pertinent to ask whether this concept of 'Indo-Pacific' concept would help address any of these big issues. Ms Tyler summed up by stating that it was an attempt to reach two oceans, and it was a topic of great importance in Asia as well as the entire world.

The Chair Ambassador Amar Nath Ram noted that with its vast potential, richness, dynamism the Indo-Pacific countries need to integrate and cooperate internally with each other to strengthen them. There should be respect for regional priorities in order to be part of Indo-Pacific economic integration.

Valedictory Session:

Ambassador Rajiv K Bhatia in his concluding remarks said that the role of a think-tank was not merely to study about the past and present, but also to think about the future by providing inputs to policy makers. The Indo-Pacific was an evolving concept, and a tool to help understand emerging international architecture. He remarked that the distinguished panellists brought forth rich and thought provoking ideas on various facets of the Indo-Pacific region. Ambassador Bhatia envisioned a great deal of debate on this theme both in academic and policy circles in the

future. He emphasised that the central point still remained that of essential unity in Asia, and that the world needed an integrated Asia. Reminiscing words of stalwarts like Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, he concluded that the message of this conference was 'unity and truth'.

Mr Sanjay Singh, Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs, India, in his Valedictory address observed that the conference had resulted in greater clarity of the concept of 'Indo-Pacific', which had been gaining increasing relevance in regional security and stability in Asia. In the last few years, the term 'Indo-Pacific' was being used increasingly during discussions amongst policy makers, strategic thinkers and think-tanks. The conference had attempted to define it spatially, obtain perspectives from the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia, US, Russia and EU. It had discussed India's engagement with the region, and the prospects for its economic integration.

The debate on the Asian perspective of the Indo-Pacific came at a time of significant progress in India's 'Look East' policy, an important basis for an Indian definition. On the other hand, another anchor for an Asian perspective of the Indo-Pacific region would be the changing geopolitics, and its effects on the region, on its stakeholders, and their strategic priorities. There was an increasing desire within Asia towards tackling common challenges and creating politico-security architecture to promote growth and prosperity, peace and stability.

Mr Singh contended that over the years, Indo-Pacific region sought to open new challenges of cooperation in disaster management, risk reduction, tourism promotion, cultural exchanges, fisheries management, trade and economic facilitation. Further, the relative importance of the region was going to increase as there would be the central role for ASEAN. The ASEAN-India Plan of Action provided direction to the project related aspects of cooperation across the political, security, economic and socio-cultural pillars. It underlined the common perspective of economic growth, shared prosperity, peace and stability, the increasing focus on capacity building and connectivity across geographic corridors, over land, sea and air, between institutions, people-to-people and now through the digital space. All this largely optimised a unique partnership, aimed at the constructive definition of the collective space. Deepening crisis in the Euro zone, terrorism, piracy and environmental challenges had led to increasing focus on the Indo-Pacific region.

The wider Indo-Pacific region was home to nearly 3 billion people, and a combined Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of nearly \$20 trillion. It had three of the four largest economies in the world i.e. China, India and Japan, and the most significant of the world's seaborne trade, including that most relevant for food and energy security. Globalisation, and the consequent compression of geographic spaces, had led 'Indo-Pacific' to come to reflect contemporary realities. Mr Singh concluded by quoting Prime Minister Manmohan Singh that "We see our partnership with ASEAN not merely as a reaffirmation of ties with neighbouring countries or as an instrument of economic development, but also as an integral part of our vision of a stable,

secure and prosperous Asia and its surrounding Indian Ocean and Pacific regions. Our future is inter-linked and a stable, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific region is crucial for our own progress and prosperity".

Dr Reena Marwah, Secretary General, Association of Asia Scholars, proposed the vote of thanks. She not only pointed out the richness of the debates and discussion on the concept of 'Indo-Pacific' and also the positive response of many of the panellists and audience towards it.

The Way Forward:

- The conference generated a great deal of interest in the concept of Indo-Pacific among scholars and policy makers alike.
- The concept of Indo-Pacific may have broader resonance in the future if appropriate measures are taken despite the divergent views.
- The necessity of factoring China's reactions to the concept of Indo-Pacific as a stake holder is vital for wider acceptability, reach and effectiveness.
- It may serve well to address the issues of practicality and feasibility of the concept of Indo-Pacific in solving regional problems.
- The geographical scope of the Indo-Pacific region is well-defined to a certain extent. However, to enrich the concept, it is pertinent that the concept may encompass political and economic contours to provide comprehensiveness.
- There is a need for spawning robust institutions not only to improve the attractiveness of the Indo-Pacific concept among countries as also to better the functioning of existing institutions.
- Effective mechanisms may be devised to resolve regional conflicts and trade disputes.
- The role of extra-regional players such as European Union in the Indo-Pacific region is an interesting phenomenon and merits attention.
- The Indo-Pacific regional conceptualisation may well be a vehicle for India to broaden and deepen its political and economic engagements in the region.
- India-Australia-Indonesia forms the core of southern underbelly of the Indo-Pacific region. Nurturing this trilateral relationship would be a significant step towards building the region.

- India-China-US constitutes another vector of Indo-Pacific region. An effort ought to be made to manage this intricate relationship for maintaining regional stability and prosperity.
- Russia, though been a dormant player in the region in the post-Cold War period, has been actively engaging in the region recently. This is an important development from political, economic and security point of view.
- An assessment may be made whether the Indo-Pacific regional configuration undermines the centrality of ASEAN and its implications for the region.
- The Indo-Pacific regional conceptualisation may provide India's Look East policy a newer tool to approach the region and extend its reach.

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