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AIC
ASEAN-India Centre at RIS

Roundtable Discussion

Aligning the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP): Establishing Operational Frameworks

Saturday, 14 March 2026 | 10.00 am
Tamarind Hall, India Habitat Centre (IHC), New Delhi (Hybrid)

Concept Note

1.   The Indo-Pacific has emerged as the central theatre of global economic growth, maritime connectivity, and strategic competition. Two major regional frameworks—the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) launched by India in 2019 and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) adopted in 2019— seek to shape the regions evolving order through inclusive, rules-based cooperation. Both frameworks emphasise openness, inclusivity, ASEAN centrality, and practical collaboration rather than alliance-driven rivalry.

2.   The AOIP prioritizes maritime cooperation, connectivity, economic development, and sustainable development, while the IPOI covers maritime security, ecology, disaster risk reduction, capacity building, and trade connectivity. Synergising IPOI and APOI could enhance stability, ensure security, and preserve peace especially through targeted achievable aims with several deliverable options:

- Strengthen regional maritime security and stability;
- Enhance economic resilience and sustainable development;

- Reinforce ASEAN centrality while expanding India–ASEAN strategic partnership;
- Reduce duplication and improve resource efficiency; and
- Promote a cooperative rather than competitive Indo-Pacific order.

3.   Despite this alignment, implementation has been slow due to fragmented institutional arrangements, lack of operational mechanisms, and reliance on voluntary cooperation. Establishing concrete operational frameworks is therefore essential to translate strategic convergence into measurable outcomes. Some guiding aspects for the discussion are as mentioned below. While these mechanisms provide valuable platforms, they operate largely in silos, leading to duplication and limited operational synergy.

4.   **Review of Existing Maritime Cooperation Mechanisms**. Several ASEAN-led and regional mechanisms already provide platforms for collaboration. These can be reviewed and qualitative outputs can be suggested.

- **ASEAN-led Forums:** The East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum promote dialogue, confidence-building, and cooperative security, reinforcing ASEAN centrality.
- **India–ASEAN Maritime Cooperation:** Initiatives such as the ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise (AIME) and the ASEAN-India Plan of Action (2021–2025) focus on maritime security, connectivity, and capacity building.
- **Indian Ocean Mechanisms:** Bodies like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) address maritime safety, blue economy issues, and naval cooperation among littoral states.
- **Bilateral and Minilateral Partnerships:** IPOI encourages flexible, pillar-based cooperation with partners such as Australia, Japan, and ASEAN members, enabling issue-specific collaboration.

5.   To operationalize IPOI–AOIP alignment, **several new approaches have been discussed to enhance the cooperation**, and some of them are as follows:

a) **Integrated Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) Network:** Linking regional and national information-fusion centres to share real-time data on shipping, piracy, illegal fishing, and disasters;

b) **Joint Capacity-Building and Training Architecture:** Establishing a coordinated training framework for coast guards, maritime law enforcement agencies, and disaster response units;

c) **Blue Economy Partnership Platform:** Promoting sustainable fisheries management, marine pollution control, renewable ocean energy, and climate resilience projects;

d) **Connectivity and Resilient Supply Chains at Sea:** Developing port infrastructure cooperation, digital maritime corridors, and secure sea lines of communication; and

e) **Coordinated Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR):** Creating standing mechanisms for rapid deployment and interoperability during natural disasters.

6.   There are implementation challenges as well. For example, the IPOI remains a voluntary, non-treaty-based framework, which can lead to fragmented coordination without a centralized secretariat. On the other, differing perceptions of the "Indo-Pacific" construct among ASEAN members can slow the pace of formalizing security cooperation. Smaller states often lack the funding or technology to participate fully in high-tech pillars like maritime domain awareness.

7.   In view of the above, this roundtable discussion will present the current status of the implementation of the AOIP and IPOI, and ways to operationalise these frameworks. The roundtable discussion will be held at India Habitat Centre (IHC), New Delhi on 14 March 2026. Capt. Sarabjeet S Parmar, Visiting Fellow, RIS will coordinate the roundtable discussion. The tentative agenda is annexed.

8.   The roundtable discussion will be attended by researchers, practitioners, maritime experts, diplomats and business people. One of the outcomes of the roundtable discussion is the policy brief to be published by the RIS.