



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

Outcome Document



RIS

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विकासशील देशों की अनुसंधान एवं सूचना प्रणाली



AIC
ASEAN-India Centre at RIS



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Centre for Maritime Economy
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CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	1
Introduction	3
Summary of Proceedings	5
Key Recommendations and Takeaways	24
Agenda	26
Glimpses	28



PREFACE

Professor Sachin Kumar Sharma

Director General, RIS

The evolving geopolitical landscape has brought renewed attention to maritime affairs, underscoring the need to preserve maritime security, strengthen regional cooperation, and nurture resilient maritime partnerships. As global economic growth increasingly depends on secure sea lanes, seamless connectivity, and stable supply chains, the Indo-Pacific has emerged as a region of immense strategic and economic significance. In this context, both India and ASEAN stand out as pivotal stakeholders in shaping a stable, secure, and inclusive Indo-Pacific order.

India and ASEAN have articulated their respective visions for the Indo-Pacific through the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). These frameworks are not competing approaches; rather, they are inherently complementary and together provide a strong foundation for advancing regional cooperation. Both emphasise openness, inclusivity, dialogue, ASEAN centrality, and practical collaboration. While the AOIP focuses on cooperation, connectivity, sustainable development, and strengthening ASEAN-led mechanisms, the IPOI places emphasis on maritime security, maritime ecology, maritime resources, disaster risk reduction, capacity building, and resource sharing. The convergence of these priorities creates significant opportunities for deeper India-ASEAN engagement across the maritime domain.

However, translating these shared principles and converging visions into meaningful outcomes requires practical and operational mechanisms for cooperation. In this regard, developing action-oriented frameworks assumes critical importance. It is against this backdrop that the ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) at RIS convened the Roundtable Discussion on “Aligning the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP): Establishing Operational Frameworks” on 14 March 2026. The roundtable brought together policymakers, scholars, practitioners, and strategic experts to deliberate on ways to operationalise the complementarities between the IPOI and the AOIP and identify practical pathways for strengthening India-ASEAN maritime cooperation.

This Outcome Report captures the major themes, perspectives, and recommendations that emerged from these deliberations. It highlights the importance of developing practical and action-oriented frameworks, strengthening institutional linkages, promoting regular dialogue and stakeholder engagement, and advancing cooperation across identified priority areas. As the Indo-Pacific continues to evolve as a key strategic and economic space, closer operational cooperation between India and ASEAN will remain essential for promoting peace, stability, connectivity, and sustainable development in the region.



Sachin Kumar Sharma



INTRODUCTION

The Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a central driver of global economic growth, maritime connectivity, and strategic engagement. At the same time, the region faces evolving challenges related to maritime security, economic resilience, sustainability, and geopolitical competition. In this context, cooperation, inclusivity, and adherence to a rules-based order have become essential for enhancing stability and shared prosperity. The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), launched by India in 2019, and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), adopted in the same year, represent two important frameworks that seek to shape the required regional order through dialogue, partnership, and pragmatic cooperation.

The convergence of IPOI and AOIP in principles, emphasis on openness, inclusivity, respect for international law, and ASEAN centrality, eases the possibility of connected frameworks. While AOIP looks at cooperation in the region, promotion of an enabling environment, enhancing ASEAN community process and strengthening ASEAN led mechanisms, and exploring cooperation in areas like maritime connectivity, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and economics, IPOI advances cooperation across the seven pillars of maritime security, maritime ecology, maritime resources, capacity building and resource sharing, and disaster risk reduction and management. Together, these frameworks offer a complementary vision for fostering a cooperative rather than competitive Indo-Pacific, grounded in shared interests and collective action. A major link is that IPOI was based on the framework of the East Asia Summit, which, as an ASEAN-led mechanism, provides the conceptual and symbiotic linkage. However, despite this strong conceptual alignment, the translation of these frameworks and linkages into tangible outcomes has been limited. The absence of structured operational mechanisms, fragmented institutional arrangements, and the voluntary nature of engagement have constrained progress. Existing regional platforms, including ASEAN-led mechanisms and Indian Ocean initiatives, while providing valuable avenues for dialogue and cooperation, often operate in silos, resulting in duplication of efforts and limited synergy.

Therefore, there is a growing recognition of the requirement to move from broad strategic convergence to actionable and result-oriented cooperation. Strengthening coordination across priority areas such as maritime security and connectivity, sustainable development, and disaster management is considered essential to enhance regional resilience. At the same time, emerging challenges, including maritime crime, climate change impact, supply chain vulnerabilities, and differences

in national capacities and capabilities, and technological gaps, underscore the importance of exploring and developing integrated and practical frameworks for cooperation.

Against this backdrop, the second roundtable discussion, “Aligning the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP): Establishing Operational Frameworks”, was convened by the ASEAN-India Centre (AIC) at the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) on 14 March 2026. The roundtable brought together policymakers, diplomats, maritime experts, practitioners, researchers, and industry representatives to exchange perspectives, assess existing mechanisms, and explore avenues for strengthening India-ASEAN cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

The deliberations underscored the importance of moving from conceptual alignment to actionable cooperation by operationalising IPOI–AOIP convergence across the pillars of the IPOI and priority areas of the AOIP. Discussions highlighted the need to leverage existing institutional mechanisms, avoid setting up new institutions, deepen multi-level engagement, and expand participation across thematic areas through flexible cooperative frameworks. Particular emphasis was placed on strengthening maritime cooperation through enhanced coordination in areas such as maritime domain awareness, information sharing, and law enforcement, as well as addressing prominent challenges in the maritime domain like piracy, illegal fishing, and other maritime crimes. Participants also stressed the importance of institutionalising cooperation through regular review mechanisms, fostering engagement to include non-state actors like NGOs, and promoting inclusive participation to ensure sustained, practical, and outcome-oriented collaboration in the Indo-Pacific.

This outcome document presents a session-wise account of the workshop proceedings, capturing a synthesis of key insights, recommendations, and actionable pathways that emerged from the roundtable discussion. It highlights priority areas for cooperation, while emphasising the importance of coordinated, inclusive, and rules-based approaches to advance a stable Indo-Pacific order.

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS



Inaugural Session

Dr. Pankaj Vashisht

*Associate Professor and Coordinator,
ASEAN-India Centre (AIC), RIS*

As ASEAN and India advance complementary Indo-Pacific frameworks, the focus must shift from alignment in vision to synergy in implementation. Practical cooperation is the key to realizing this shared agenda.

Dr. Pankaj Vashisht

Associate Professor and Coordinator,
ASEAN-India Centre (AIC), RIS

In his welcome remarks, **Dr. Pankaj Vashisht** highlighted the significance of the roundtable as part of a broader series of engagements being organised by the ASEAN-India Centre at RIS to celebrate 2026 as the ASEAN-India Year of Maritime Cooperation. He noted that the current discussion builds on earlier deliberations on geopolitical and geoeconomic challenges in the Indo-Pacific and represents a logical progression towards examining pathways for operationalising cooperation.

Dr. Vashisht underscored the fact that both AOIP and IPOI serve as important frameworks advanced by ASEAN and India, respectively, to shape regional engagement.

He emphasised that these frameworks exhibit substantial complementarities, particularly in their shared emphasis on cooperation, inclusivity, and regional stability.

Framing the objectives of the session, he stated that the focus of the deliberations would be on identifying actionable synergies between AOIP and IPOI and translating them into practical outcomes. He also highlighted that the roundtable would feature multiple sessions to comprehensively examine these issues, bringing together policymakers, diplomats, and experts to contribute to the discourse on strengthening ASEAN-India cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.



With institutional coherence and practical collaboration defining the way forward, ASEAN-India cooperation in the Indo-Pacific must be anchored in complementarity and ASEAN centrality.

Prof. Sachin Kumar Sharma

Director General, RIS

Professor Sachin Kumar Sharma

Director General, RIS

In his opening remarks, Prof. Sachin Kumar Sharma underscored the growing importance of maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, noting the region's centrality to global trade, economic activity, and strategic stability. He highlighted that the roundtable builds on earlier discussions on geopolitical and geoeconomic trends, with a more focused emphasis on operationalizing cooperation through existing regional frameworks.

Prof. Sharma emphasised that both the IPOI, introduced by India, and the AOIP reflect complementary approaches to regional engagement. While the AOIP focuses on cooperation in areas such as connectivity, sustainable development, and maritime collaboration, the IPOI provides a structure through its seven pillars. He noted that these complementarities offer a strong foundation for advancing India-ASEAN cooperation and strengthening regional stability, economic resilience, and sustainable use of maritime resources.



The alignment of AOIP and IPOI is not about bridging gaps, but about advancing an inherent convergence of purpose. This synergy offers a powerful pathway for peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.

H.E. Josel F. Ignacio

Ambassador of the Philippines to India

At the same time, he identified key challenges that need to be addressed to translate this convergence into practice. These include the fragmentation of existing cooperation mechanisms across multiple institutions, varying perspectives among ASEAN member states on the Indo-Pacific construct, and differences in capacities across countries in the region.

To address these challenges, Prof. Sharma outlined three practical approaches. He first emphasised the need to institutionalise pillar-based cooperation through regular interactions and knowledge exchange, strengthen and better utilise existing mechanisms. Second was to review existing mechanisms and strengthen them to facilitate better cooperation. Third was to establish collaborative platforms to integrate and strengthen niche areas like maritime domain awareness and blue economy. To this, he added joint capacity-building programmes that would enable better cooperation.

While concluding, he reaffirmed that India-ASEAN maritime cooperation must remain anchored in the principle of ASEAN centrality and called for focused, outcome-oriented discussions to translate the shared vision into actionable outcomes.

H.E. Josel F. Ignacio

Ambassador of the Philippines to India

In his special remarks, Ambassador Josel F. Ignacio underscored the enduring relevance and vast potential of Indo-Pacific cooperation, emphasising that discussions on aligning IPOI and AOIP should be seen not as addressing divergences, but as advancing an established, strong convergence of purpose.

He highlighted that both frameworks, adopted in 2019, are inherently complementary, reflecting shared principles such as openness, inclusivity, respect for sovereignty, and peaceful dispute

resolution, and adherence to a rules-based international order. Central to this convergence is ASEAN centrality, which continues to anchor regional cooperation and architecture, supported by India's consistent commitment.

Ambassador Ignacio emphasised the Indo-Pacific's critical importance as the epicentre of global economic activity, a manufacturing hub, trade and innovation, and a region rich in marine biodiversity and natural resources. At the same time, he noted that the region faces intensifying geopolitical contestation and strategic rivalries, making cooperative frameworks like AOIP and IPOI essential for fostering dialogue, mitigating tensions, and ensuring stability.

cooperation rather than rivalry, where middle powers play a vital role as bridge-builders in promoting multilateral solutions. In this context, adherence to international law, particularly the United Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), remains a fundamental principle in safeguarding freedom of navigation, ensuring equity in the global commons, and sustaining regional prosperity.

Ambassador Ignacio identified several priority areas for ASEAN-India engagement, including maritime safety and security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), search and rescue (SAR), and combating non-traditional threats such as piracy, smuggling, and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. He also emphasised the importance of collaboration in sustainable marine resource management, biodiversity conservation, and support for coastal livelihoods.

Highlighting the Philippines' priorities as ASEAN Chair, he pointed to a strong focus on maritime cooperation, including enhanced coordination among maritime agencies, promotion of maritime studies, and efforts to conclude an effective Code of Conduct in the South China Sea. He also stated that there will be an expanded engagement in the

Indo-Pacific, with the Pacific Forum and Indian Ocean Region nations.

In the economic domain, deliverables would be guided by the concept of prosperity corridors, linkages and pathways with emphasis on leveraging AI and digital transformation. The focus would be on MSME empowerment and health aspects.

In conclusion, Ambassador Ignacio reaffirmed that the synergies between AOIP and IPOI, grounded in shared values and historical linkages, offer a unique opportunity to advance peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific. He expressed confidence that continued dialogue and cooperation would translate this convergence into meaningful, outcome-oriented action.



The alignment between the IPOI and the AOIP is not merely a matter of diplomatic convergence but a strategic necessity.

Shri Vishwesh Negi

Joint Secretary (Indo-Pacific),
Ministry of External Affairs,
Government of India

Shri Vishwesh Negi

Joint Secretary (Indo-Pacific), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India

In his keynote address, Shri Vishwesh Negi underscored India's strong and enduring commitment to advancing cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, particularly with ASEAN, describing it as a core pillar of India's foreign policy. He emphasized that the alignment between the IPOI and the AOIP is not merely a matter of diplomatic convergence but a strategic necessity for ensuring shared prosperity and stability in an increasingly contested region. Situating his remarks within the evolving global context, he noted that the Indo-Pacific has emerged as a central arena of geopolitical competition, economic dynamism, and strategic uncertainty, marked by maritime disputes, climate challenges, and supply chain vulnerabilities.

Reflecting on the proliferation of Indo-Pacific strategies by major and middle powers alike, he highlighted India's own evolving vision, from SAGAR (Security and Growth for All

in the Region) to MAHASAGAR (Mutual And Holistic Advancement for Security And Growth Across Regions), as a comprehensive and inclusive approach to regional engagement. He reiterated that ASEAN centrality remains fundamental to India's Indo-Pacific vision, with the AOIP serving as a crucial anchor for regional architecture. He also flagged the 2021 ASEAN-India Joint Statement on AOIP as a milestone in institutionalizing cooperation through established mechanisms such as the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum.

Shri Negi highlighted the breadth and depth of India-ASEAN engagement across multiple domains, including connectivity, trade, digital integration, and people-to-people ties. He noted that bilateral trade has reached approximately USD 120 billion, with ongoing efforts to review the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA) to enhance its effectiveness. He also emphasized growing digital and financial connectivity, including the expansion of UPI-based cross-border payment systems across several ASEAN countries. Institutional cooperation is further supported by dedicated funding mechanisms such as the ASEAN-India Fund, Science and Technology Development Fund, Green Fund, and Digital Future Fund, alongside capacity-building initiatives, scholarships, and over 200 community-oriented projects in CLMV countries.

Focusing on maritime cooperation, he highlighted India's role as a first responder in the region, citing humanitarian assistance operations such as Operation Brahma and Operation Sagar, as well as growing collaboration in HADR, maritime security, and blue economy initiatives. He outlined several practical areas for advancing cooperation during the ASEAN-India Year of Maritime Cooperation, including maritime law education, joint surveillance, and

search and rescue operations, marine pollution mitigation, co-deployment of naval assets, and shipbuilding and repair partnerships. He also identified emerging priorities such as securing submarine cables and enhancing maritime domain awareness (MDA), noting the role of India's Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) as a hub for regional information-sharing.

Shri Negi further emphasized India's expanding defense and security engagements, including participation in multilateral naval frameworks, deployment of personnel in international commands, and efforts to enhance interoperability with partner countries. He highlighted the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) as an important complementary platform, noting India's current chairship and plans to advance cooperation in maritime safety, HADR, and capacity building in collaboration with ASEAN members.

In addition, he underscored opportunities in emerging technologies and innovation, including semiconductors, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, and defence startups, referencing initiatives such as the ASEAN-India Scale Hub to foster entrepreneurial collaboration. He also stressed the importance of training and capacity building, proposing the development of Centres of Excellence in India for both civilian and military maritime domains.

Concluding, Shri Negi called for a shift from dialogue-driven engagement to tangible, outcome-oriented cooperation, emphasizing that the IPOI-AOIP partnership represents a new model of regionalism based on collaboration, inclusivity, and shared responsibility. He expressed confidence that through sustained efforts and practical initiatives, India and ASEAN can jointly ensure that the Indo-Pacific remains a region of peace, stability, and prosperity.



In a rapidly evolving Indo-Pacific, complementarities alone are not enough. With the Indo-Pacific presenting itself as both a challenge and an opportunity, real progress lies in converting shared vision into tangible outcomes.

Ambassador Riva Ganguly Das

Former Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India

Session I : From Vision to Action: Operationalizing IPOI-AOIP Synergy

Ambassador Riva Ganguly Das

Former Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India

Chairing the first session, Ambassador Riva Ganguly Das, set the tone for the session by emphasising the importance of translating the shared vision of the Indo-Pacific into actionable cooperation. Reflecting on her tenure in government, she highlighted the significance of the first joint statement aligning IPOI and AOIP, describing it as a landmark step in articulating a structured and substantive framework for cooperation between India and ASEAN.

She noted that while the Indo-Pacific is a relatively recent addition to the global diplomatic lexicon, for India, it represents a natural and historically grounded space shaped



The real value of AOIP–IPOI convergence lies in translating shared principles into functional cooperation. AOIP provides the normative foundation, while IPOI offers the operational pathway for cooperation.

Dr. Don McLain Gill

De La Salle University & Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

by long-standing civilizational linkages. In the current global context marked by geopolitical contestation and uncertainty, the region has emerged as a critical arena where both challenges and opportunities coexist. She underscored that this moment calls for deeper collaboration between India and ASEAN to collectively respond to evolving dynamics.

Ambassador Das highlighted the broad convergence between IPOI and AOIP across multiple areas, including maritime security, maritime ecology, resource management, capacity building, disaster risk reduction, science and technology cooperation, connectivity, and trade. She observed that ASEAN member states, along with other partners, are already participating across several of these domains, providing a strong foundation for further cooperation.

Framing the discussion ahead, she stressed that the focus must now shift from identifying complementarities to operationalisation through practical engagement. In this regard, she emphasized the need to leverage existing partnerships, deepen participation across thematic pillars, and explore new avenues for collaboration to strengthen India-ASEAN engagement in the Indo-Pacific.

Dr. Don McLain Gill

De La Salle University & Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada

Dr. Don McLain Gill examined the convergence between AOIP and IPOI through conceptual, institutional, and practical aspects, while reflecting the Philippine perspective. He emphasised that the AOIP is anchored in principles of inclusivity, multi-alignment, political independence, and ASEAN centrality, while deliberately avoiding alignment against any third country. Its focus on rules-based

order, freedom of navigation, and ASEAN-led mechanisms reflect its role as a norm-setting and confidence-building framework, although inherent limitations in addressing hard security challenges do exist.

With regard to the IPOI, Dr. Gill highlighted its operational and flexible character, noting that it seeks to leverage existing institutional mechanisms rather than create new ones, and aligns with the vision of SAGAR, now elevated to MAHASAGAR. The voluntary and pillar-based structure of the IPOI enables pragmatic cooperation among like-minded partners, both at the institutional and state-to-state levels. He underscored that this flexibility is particularly suited to the complex and diverse realities of the Indo-Pacific.

On convergences, he pointed to a clear and evolving alignment between AOIP and IPOI, as reflected in successive ASEAN-India joint statements and the elevation of ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. These developments signal a shift from conceptual alignment to practical cooperation between the two regional institutional frameworks. He emphasised that the cooperation could be more effective with more participation of ASEAN nations in IPOI, which presently sees the participation of Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. From a Philippine perspective, given its existential importance as an archipelagic state, Dr. Gill highlighted maritime security as a central pillar of concern and cooperation. He pointed to the growing India-Philippines strategic partnership as a key example of how IPOI-AOIP convergence can be operationalised, particularly through institutionalised maritime dialogues, coast guard cooperation, and capacity-building initiatives. He also identified maritime domain awareness, information sharing, and participation in broader Indian Ocean frameworks as important avenues for deepening engagement.

Finally, he concluded by emphasizing the importance of expanding cooperation beyond state actors, noting that sustained engagement by non-governmental stakeholders, think tanks, and the private sector is essential for ensuring continuity amid shifting political dynamics. While concluding, he reiterated that although conceptual convergence between AOIP and IPOI is well established, the next phase must prioritise practical, multi-level cooperation to fully realise the potential of both entities.



Beyond geopolitics, India-ASEAN engagement must deepen through knowledge and innovation ecosystems. Leveraging platforms like IITs and IIMs can anchor long-term strategic and economic collaboration

Mr. Sanjay Pulipaka

Chairperson, Politeia Research Foundation

Mr. Sanjay Pulipaka

Chairperson, Politeia Research Foundation (PRF)

Mr. Sanjay Pulipaka contextualised the Indo-Pacific as a strategic construct shaped by evolving power relationships rather than a purely geographic reality. Drawing on historical examples, he underscored how shifts in regional concepts from “Indo-China” to “Southeast Asia” reflect changes in political influence. He also noted that the decline of Indian influence is considerable and cited the reference to the islands in the Pacific Ocean, termed the Indian Ocean Pacific Islands of India, in the journals of the early 1900s. He also reminded the audience that due to the Cold War the superpowers did not find any utility in the concept of Indo-Pacific. Jumping forward to the contemporary period, Mr Pulipaka stated that the contemporary articulation of India’s view of the Indo-Pacific is linked to India’s economic rise and renewed centrality in regional affairs. He emphasised that the concept of the Indo-Pacific is not merely a geopolitical response to any one country, but a broader reassertion of the role nations, like India, play in shaping regional imagination.

Addressing the concerns of Southeast Asia, he noted that the apprehensions arose from the fear that there would be amplification of fault lines, big power contestations, and the dilution of ASEAN

centrality. Over time, the Indo-Pacific framework has enhanced regional engagement, with ASEAN itself formally embracing the concept through the AOIP. He highlighted the convergence between India's articulation of a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific anchored in ASEAN centrality and a rules-based order and ASEAN's own priorities of connectivity, development, and maritime cooperation.

Pointing to disruptions that cut across economic, political, and security domains, Mr. Pulipaka stressed that recent global developments have exposed the limits of reliance that can be placed on major powers as security providers. In this context, he argued for a more proactive and collective India-ASEAN approach within an expanded regional framework, where crises in distant geographical areas have direct consequences for both. He suggested that India and ASEAN should coordinate more closely, including through joint positions on critical issues affecting shared interests.

Highlighting operational priorities, he emphasised the urgency of strengthening connectivity to reduce dependency on strategic choke points, and advocated for the implementation of alternative corridors and enhanced India-Southeast Asia linkages. He also called for greater collaboration in conflict management, suggesting that India's experience in addressing internal conflicts could inform cooperative mechanisms with ASEAN, while respecting principles of sovereignty and non-interference.

On the economic front, he underscored the importance of expediting the review of the ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement, framing trade not only as an economic imperative but also as a strategic and political tool. He then identified opportunities for cooperation in critical and emerging sectors, including rare earths, semiconductors, and dual-use manufacturing, to build resilient supply chains and reduce vulnerabilities.

Mr. Pulipaka also highlighted the need to deepen institutional and knowledge partnerships, suggesting redesign and better utilisation of existing initiatives. He pointed out that the PhD programmes through IITs, alongside greater integration with management institutions like IIMs, could foster technology management and business linkages. In conclusion, he argued that the Indo-Pacific will remain a decentralised and multi-layered architecture, which calls for innovative formats of engagement across regional groupings to strengthen India-ASEAN convergence and collective resilience.



Trust in regional cooperation cannot remain rhetorical—it must be incentivized through tangible outcomes. Material convergence is the key to sustaining Indo-Pacific partnerships.

Dr. Monish Tourangbam

Senior Research Fellow, Chintan Research Foundation (CRF)

Dr. Monish Tourangbam

Senior Research Fellow, Chintan Research Foundation (CRF)

Dr. Monish Tourangbam approached the discussion by raising critical conceptual and strategic questions underpinning the Indo-Pacific discourse, emphasising that rapidly shifting geopolitical realities are challenging existing analytical frameworks. He argued that beyond operational cooperation, there is a need for deeper intellectual engagement with the very concepts that define regionalism, particularly as traditional approaches struggle to keep pace with evolving global dynamics.

He highlighted the key issue of the ambiguity surrounding the characterisation of the Indo-Pacific. While India and ASEAN have framed their approaches, IPOI and AOIP, as inclusive and non-strategic, several other countries explicitly define the Indo-Pacific as a strategy. He noted that this divergence reflects deeper contestation over the meaning of strategy itself, and whether the region is approached through cooperation or competition. In this context, he underscored the importance of sustained scholarly inquiry to clarify these conceptual foundations and to forge better alignment and vision with practice.

Dr. Tourangbam also emphasised the challenge of maintaining predictability in an increasingly uncertain global environment. He pointed out that post-2019 developments, particularly the pandemic, the centrality of supply chains, and the emphasis on economic diversification, played a critical role in reshaping regional priorities. These shifts, along with evolving geopolitical postures, especially of the United States, which he identified as a disruptor, necessitate a reassessment of how Indo-Pacific cooperation frameworks are to be operationalised.

He further examined the geographical and political framing of the Indo-Pacific, examining how it differed from earlier constructs such as the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean region. This difference, he suggested, has implications for inclusivity, regional signalling, and the extent to which external powers shape the discourse. Relatedly, he raised the question of whether Indo-Pacific cooperation can be meaningfully advanced independent of major power involvement and influence, specifically the United States and China.

A central theme of his intervention was the need to move beyond rhetorical commitments to building trust by grounding it in tangible outcomes. He argued that trust must be incentivised through measurable economic and strategic benefits, especially in areas such as supply chains and geo-economic cooperation. Without such material foundations, there is the risk of trust remaining normative rather than operational.

Finally, Dr. Tourangbam drew attention to sub-regional and ground-level dimensions of cooperation, particularly in the eastern Indian Ocean and land border regions linking India and Southeast Asia. In conclusion, he highlighted the strategic importance of the eastern Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal sub-region, and the value that coastal development partnerships between India and ASEAN Member States hold.



In a complex geopolitical environment, middle powers like India and ASEAN must anchor stability. Strengthening institutional frameworks will be critical to navigate emerging challenges.

Capt. Sarabjeet S. Parmar (Retd.)

Visiting Fellow at RIS, New Delhi

Session II: Maritime Cooperation for a Secure and Sustainable Indo-Pacific

Capt. Sarabjeet S. Parmar (Retd.)

Visiting Fellow, RIS

Chairing the second session, Capt. Sarabjeet S. Parmar (Retd.) emphasised the need to translate the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) from conceptual frameworks into actionable outcomes. He highlighted the inherent linkage between IPOI and ASEAN, emphasising that IPOI was introduced through the East Asia Summit (EAS) framework and was intended to function in synergy with ASEAN-led mechanisms. However, he observed that the initiative-driven approach of IPOI had lost momentum and required stronger leadership, mainly from India, to drive implementation and ensure tangible cooperation. Capt. Parmar also underscored key geopolitical challenges shaping maritime cooperation, including the implications of the United States

National Security and Military Strategies and China's activities in the South China Sea. He cautioned that evolving geopolitical dynamics could complicate India-ASEAN cooperation, and emphasised the growing importance of middle powers, particularly India and ASEAN, in building cooperative frameworks and contributing to regional stability. He recalled DG RIS's three points, especially greater institutionalisation of Indo-Pacific initiatives, the establishment of regular review mechanisms, and enhanced collaboration between India and ASEAN to ensure sustained and effective maritime cooperation.



Regional cooperation must adapt to shifting geopolitical dynamics. With the only ASEAN member state sharing a land border with India, Myanmar sees strong potential in deeper, structured engagement with India and ASEAN.

Ambassador Lahaipai Zau Goone

Senior Advisor, Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (MISIS), Yangon.

Ambassador Lahaipai Zau Goone

Senior Advisor, Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (MISIS), Yangon.

Ambassador Lahaipai Zau Goone shared Myanmar's perspective on IPOI and the AOIP within the context of an evolving and increasingly fragmented global order. He noted that shifting geopolitical dynamics, weakening multilateral institutions, and growing strategic competition have prompted countries to pursue flexible, interest-based partnerships. Highlighting Myanmar's geostrategic significance, given its long coastline, exclusive economic zone, and land border with India, he underscored the importance of regional cooperation for sustainable development in the Indo-Pacific. He expressed appreciation for India's prompt humanitarian assistance, Operation Brahma, following a recent natural disaster and described it as a model of effective cooperation. He also noted the centrality of maritime trade to Myanmar's economy and the role of public-private partnerships in port management. Acknowledging internal challenges that have constrained deeper regional engagement, he expressed optimism about greater participation following recent political developments and called for more structured cooperation between India and ASEAN.



Maritime Domain Awareness must evolve beyond the surface to include the underwater domain. Strengthening this capability is critical for securing the Indo-Pacific.

Cmde. Anil Jai Singh (Retd.)

Vice President, Indian Maritime Foundation (IMR), New Delhi

Cmde. Anil Jai Singh (Retd.)

Vice President, Indian Maritime Foundation (IMR), New Delhi

Cmde. Anil Jai Singh (Retd.) highlighted the strong convergence between the IPOI and the AOIP, emphasising their shared maritime orientation and the centrality of ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific region, which is a predominantly maritime area. Drawing on his extensive maritime experience, he underscored the evolving geopolitical context, noting parallels with a Cold War 2.0 and the increasing strategic salience of the region. He identified six prominent military and non-military areas for India and ASEAN to focus on. He stressed the importance of strengthening Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), particularly by expanding its scope beyond surface-level monitoring to include underwater domain awareness (UDA). He emphasised the importance of nations developing their own MDA and UDA structures and joining existing frameworks, which he noted as critical for addressing both traditional and non-traditional maritime security challenges. He gave the example of China's 'Great Underwater Wall', which is a five-layer sensing system stretching from the seabed to space. He also identified priority areas for cooperation, including enhanced naval interoperability through bilateral exercises, protection of critical seabed infrastructure, and inclusive capacity-building in civilian maritime sectors such as shipbuilding and port development. He also emphasised the growing impact of climate change on maritime security and the need for cooperation in disaster risk reduction.

Highlighting India's role, he called for deeper collaboration among regional mechanisms such as the BIMSTEC, the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), among others, alongside improved inter-agency coordination and engagement with external partners. He concluded that the designation of 2026 as the Year of ASEAN-India Maritime Cooperation



Progress in maritime cooperation is evident, but uneven capacities remain a constraint. Enhanced cooperation in MDA, blue economy, and connectivity must be prioritized.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vo Xuan Vin

Director General, Institute of History, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS), Hanoi

offers a timely opportunity to enhance coordination, build capacity, and advance a free, open, and rules-based Indo-Pacific.

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Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vo Xuan Vin, outlining the progress and challenges in India-ASEAN maritime cooperation, highlighted advancements in naval exercises, capacity building, and engagement through various platforms. Noting that cooperation between India and ASEAN has developed over many years through institutional mechanisms, maritime security engagement, naval diplomacy, and capacity-building initiatives, he highlighted areas where progress has been visible, including joint naval exercises, maritime training programmes, and expanding defence and security cooperation with several ASEAN member states. These efforts, he noted, have strengthened trust and interoperability while supporting a rules-based maritime order in the region.

However, he emphasized that despite the growing cooperation, some limitations and challenges need to be addressed. These emanate mostly from great power competition, internal diversity within ASEAN, and capacity gaps among member states. As priorities, he stressed the need to strengthen adherence to international law, enhance maritime domain awareness through better information-sharing, promote blue economy and environmental cooperation, and expand connectivity. He concluded by underscoring the need for greater Indian support in capacity and capability building to assist smaller ASEAN countries in addressing maritime security challenges.



Trust in regional cooperation cannot remain rhetorical—it must be incentivized through tangible outcomes. Material convergence is the key to sustaining Indo-Pacific partnerships.

Dr. Stuti Banerjee

Senior Research Fellow, Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA)

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Senior Research Fellow, Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), New Delhi

Dr. Stuti Banerjee examined sustainability and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific from a geopolitical perspective, emphasising India's role as an emerging maritime power with a growing stake in ensuring a secure and stable regional environment. She highlighted the need for India and ASEAN to move beyond reactive approaches and jointly shape strategic narratives in the region. Acknowledging the realities of great power competition, she stressed that India and ASEAN should focus on certain areas of cooperation that avoid strategic polarization and divergences. These include digital economy collaboration, sustainable development, renewable energy, environmental protection, and maritime resource management, with reference to ecology and protection of maritime resources, both living and non-living. She reiterated the point that all these aspects find alignment within the framework of IPOI and AOIP. She also underscored the importance of strengthening academic partnerships, capacity building, and cooperation in emerging technologies to reduce dependence on external powers. Finally, she highlighted the value of sustained engagement through informal dialogues to build trust, enhance connectivity, and enable deeper cooperation across both traditional and non-traditional sectors.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS AND TAKEAWAYS

Building on the deliberations during the roundtable discussions, participants agreed that the convergence between the IPOI and the AOIP offers a valuable opportunity to strengthen cooperative frameworks in the Indo-Pacific region and highlighted that both IPOI and AOIP emphasise openness, inclusivity, and ASEAN centrality, and translating these shared principles into concrete initiatives will be critical for ensuring meaningful outcomes. Participants noted that emerging maritime security challenges, evolving geopolitical dynamics, great power rivalry, and increasing economic interdependence make it imperative to operationalise these frameworks through coordinated and practical cooperation. In this context, the following key recommendations and takeaways emerged from the discussions:

- **Promote the development of an integrated Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) architecture** by linking regional information-sharing centres and national maritime monitoring systems to facilitate real-time exchange of information on shipping movements, illegal fishing activities, maritime crime, and emergencies. This also includes developing the requisite capacity and capabilities, where required.
- **Strengthen maritime law enforcement cooperation** through regular exchanges between coast guards, maritime law enforcement agencies, and related institutions of India and ASEAN. Emphasis would be on joint training programmes, interoperability enhancement and joint operational coordination mechanisms.
- **Expand joint capacity building initiatives** by developing coordinated training programmes for maritime security agencies, disaster management authorities, and institutions involved in ocean governance and maritime safety.
- **Enhance cooperation in the blue economy sector** through collaborative research and initiatives in sustainable fisheries management, marine resource conservation, marine scientific research, and development of renewable ocean energy technologies.
- **Strengthen operational synergy between IPOI and AOIP** by identifying clearly defined sectors such as maritime security, connectivity, sustainable development, and disaster management, where collaborative initiatives can deliver measurable and practical outcomes.
- **Develop a mechanism to periodically review IPOI-AOIP cooperation**, enabling tracking of progress, assessing implementation gaps, and identifying new areas of collaboration based on evolving regional priorities.

- **Strengthen regional coordination on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)** by developing standard operating procedures, conducting joint simulations and actual exercises, and improving interoperability among regional response agencies.
- **Promote resilient maritime connectivity and supply chains** by encouraging collaboration in port development, digital maritime corridors, logistics infrastructure, and initiatives aimed at safeguarding critical Sea Lines of Communication.
- **Leverage the Year of ASEAN-India Maritime Cooperation (2026)** as an opportunity to initiate flagship programmes and joint projects that can demonstrate tangible outcomes in maritime cooperation between India and ASEAN.
- **Encourage deeper engagement among academic and policy institutions** by establishing networks of think tanks, universities, and research organisations to facilitate knowledge exchange, policy research, and evidence-based discussions on issues of mutual convergence..
- **Strengthen the role of ASEAN-led platforms** by ensuring that initiatives under IPOI complement existing mechanisms such as the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum, thereby reinforcing ASEAN centrality in regional architecture.
- **Promote greater participation of smaller and developing maritime states** by facilitating access to technology, capacity and capability building programmes, and financial assistance to support effective participation in areas such as maritime domain awareness and ocean governance.
- **Encourage flexible minilateral and issue-based partnerships** among India, ASEAN member states, and other like-minded countries to address specific challenges such as maritime security, climate resilience, IUU fishing, and sustainable ocean management.
- **Strengthen regional cooperation on maritime environmental protection** by promoting joint initiatives to address marine pollution, climate change impacts on coastal ecosystems, and sustainable management of marine biodiversity.
- **Develop institutional linkages between existing regional maritime initiatives** such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), and ASEAN maritime mechanisms to reduce duplication of efforts and enhance policy coordination.
- **Promote regular policy dialogues and strategic consultations** among policymakers, diplomats, security experts, and industry stakeholders to sustain momentum in cooperation and ensure alignment between policy frameworks and operational priorities.

AGENDA

10.00 AM - 10.30 AM	Registration
10.30 AM - 11.10 AM	<p>Inaugural Session</p> <p>Welcome Remarks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Pankaj Vashisht, Associate Professor and Coordinator, ASEAN-India Centre (AIC), RIS, New Delhi <p>Opening Remarks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professor Sachin Kumar Sharma, Director General, RIS, New Delhi <p>Special Remarks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H.E. Josel F. Ignacio, Ambassador of Philippines to India <p>Keynote Address:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shri Vishwesh Negi, Joint Secretary (Indo-Pacific), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India
11.10 AM - 11.30 AM	Group photo, Tea/Coffee
11.30 - 13.00 hrs.	<p>Session I: From Vision to Action: Operationalizing IPOI-AOIP Synergy</p> <p>Chair:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambassador Riva Ganguly Das, Former Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India <p>Panellists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Don McLain Gill, Lecturer, Department of International Studies, De La Salle University, Philippines and Indo-Pacific Research Fellow, Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada (Online) • Dr. Sanjay Pulipaka, Chairperson, Politeia Research Foundation, Hyderabad • Mr. Surat Horachaikul, Associate Professor, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, (Online) • Dr. Monish Tourangbam, Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Geopolitics and Strategic Studies, Chintan Research Foundation (CRF), New Delhi <p>Q&A</p>

13.00 PM- 14.00 PM	Lunch
14.00 PM - 15.30 PM	<p>Session II: Maritime Cooperation for a Secure and Sustainable Indo-Pacific</p> <p>Chair:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capt. Sarabjeet S Parmar (Retd.), Visiting Fellow, RIS, New Delhi <p>Panellists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambassador Lahpai Zau Goone, Senior Advisor, Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (MISIS), Yangon • Cmde. Anil Jai Singh (Retd.), Vice President, Indian Maritime Foundation (IMR), New Delhi • Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vo Xuan Vin, Director General, Institute of History, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS), Hanoi • Dr. Stuti Banerjee, Senior Research Fellow, Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), New Delhi <p>Q&A</p>
15.30 PM - 15.45 PM	<p>Closing Session</p> <p>Valedictory Address:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ambassador Srinivas Gotru, Indian Ambassador to ASEAN <p>Vote of Thanks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capt. Sarabjeet S Parmar (Retd.), Visiting Fellow, RIS, New Delhi

Glimpses of the Event







RIS
Research and Information System
for Developing Countries
विकासशील देशों की अनुसंधान एवं सूचना प्रणाली

RIS specialises in issues related to international economic development, trade, investment and technology. It is envisioned as a forum for fostering effective policy dialogue and capacity-building among developing countries on global and regional economic issues. The focus of the work programme of RIS is to promote South-South Cooperation and collaborate with developing countries in multilateral negotiations in various forums. Through its following centres/forums, RIS promotes policy dialogue and coherence on regional and international economic issues.



The word “DAKSHIN” (दक्षिण) is of Sanskrit origin, meaning “South.” The Hon’ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, inaugurated DAKSHIN – Global South Centre of Excellence in November 2023. The initiative was inspired by the deliberations of Global South leaders during the Voice of the Global South Summits. DAKSHIN stands for Development and Knowledge Sharing Initiative. Hosted at the RIS, DAKSHIN has established linkages with leading think tanks and universities across the Global South and is building a dynamic network of scholars working on Global South issues.



AIC at RIS has been working to strengthen India’s strategic partnership with ASEAN in its realisation of the ASEAN Community. AIC at RIS undertakes research, policy advocacy and regular networking activities with relevant organisations and think-tanks in India and ASEAN countries, with the aim of providing policy inputs, up-to-date information, data resources and sustained interaction, for strengthening ASEAN-India partnership.



CMEC has been established at RIS under the aegis of the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPS&W), Government of India. CMEC is a collaboration between RIS and Indian Ports Association (IPA). It has been mandated to act as an advisory/technological arm of MoPSW to provide the analytical support on policies and their implementation.



FITM is a joint initiative by the Ministry of Ayush and RIS. It has been established with the objective of undertaking policy research on economy, intellectual property rights (IPRs) trade, sustainability and international cooperation in traditional medicines. FITM provides analytical support to the Ministry of Ayush on policy and strategy responses on emerging national and global developments.



BEF aims to serve as a dedicated platform for fostering dialogue on promoting the concept in the Indian Ocean and other regions. The forum focuses on conducting studies on the potential, prospects and challenges of blue economy; providing regular inputs to practitioners in the government and the private sectors; and promoting advocacy for its smooth adoption in national economic policies.



FIDC, has been engaged in exploring nuances of India’s development cooperation programme, keeping in view the wider perspective of South-South Cooperation in the backdrop of international development cooperation scenario. It is a tripartite initiative of the Development Partnership Administration (DPA) of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, academia and civil society organisations.



FISD aims to harness the full potential and synergy between science and technology, diplomacy, foreign policy and development cooperation in order to meet India’s development and security needs. It is also engaged in strengthening India’s engagement with the international system and on key global issues involving science and technology.



As part of its work programme, RIS has been deeply involved in strengthening economic integration in the South Asia region. In this context, the role of the South Asia Centre for Policy Studies (SACEPS) is very important. SACEPS is a network organisation engaged in addressing regional issues of common concerns in South Asia.



Knowledge generated endogenously among the Southern partners can help in consolidation of stronger common issues at different global policy fora. The purpose of NeST is to provide a global platform for Southern Think-Tanks for collaboratively generating, systematising, consolidating and sharing knowledge on South South Cooperation approaches for international development.



DST-Satellite Centre for Policy Research on STI Diplomacy at RIS aims to advance policy research at the intersection of science, technology, innovation (STI) and diplomacy, in alignment with India’s developmental priorities and foreign policy objectives.

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