

Australia India Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative Partnership Dialogue on Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI): Strengthening International Cooperation

Organised by
Centre for Public Policy Research, India
In collaboration with
Monash University, Australia
with support from
**Department of Foreign Affairs
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The support of Australian Consulate-General in Chennai is gratefully acknowledged in organising and conducting the Conference.

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A special thanks to the management and staff of Hotel Avenue Regent, MG Road, Kochi for providing an excellent venue for hosting the conference.

The Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR), Kochi, in collaboration with Monash University, Australia, with the support from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Government of Australia, organised a two-day conference in Kochi, Kerala on April 21-22, 2022. The theme of the conference was “**AIPOIP (Australia India Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative Partnership) Dialogue on Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative : Strengthening International Cooperation.**” The AIPOIP aligns with other bilateral arrangements, including Australia-India Maritime and 2+2 Dialogues, and with Australia’s cooperation with ASEAN under its Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. Keeping in line with the spirit of AIPOIP, the two day conference was aimed to help shape maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region and support an open, inclusive, resilient, prosperous, and rules-based maritime order.

In pursuit of this goal, the two day conference opened up the platform for discussion with not only Indian and Australian experts, it also included ASEAN representatives and scholars. The conference aimed to further the scholarship in the Indo-Pacific region, along with deliberating on the important issues and challenges that concern the region.

DAY 1

Two- Day Conference on IPOI: Strengthening International Cooperation

IPOI Scholars Connect

The conference began with a Round Table Discussion in the context of ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). With the Indian-ASEAN Plan of Action (2021-2025) adopted in September 2020, the discussion was aimed at building links with experts and scholars, and to drive closer the engagement between Australia, ASEAN nations and India. The conference was chaired by **Mr. KV Thomas, Senior Fellow (Internal Security and Extremism), CPPR** and 10 eminent personalities from ASEAN nations with vast academic expertise, who presented the ASEAN perspective on IPOI. The chair initiated the round table discussion stating that the scholar meet would bring with it a myriad of topics to discuss and deliberate on.



Mr. Raksmei Him, Research Fellow, Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace, Cambodia was the first to commence the scholar discussion at the round table conference. He focused on the topic of ‘promoting peace and security in the Indo-Pacific’, in coordination with Australia, India and ASEAN nations. He also touched on the issues that the Indo-Pacific region faces, the great power rivalry and how Australia, India and ASEAN nations can address challenges, like the pandemic, together. **Dr. Mukund V. Narvenkar, Assistant Professor, School of International and Area Studies, Goa University, India**, focused his presentation on ‘understanding strategic contours of India’s perspective on Indo-Pacific’. He talked about the growing Chinese hegemony in the Indian Ocean region, the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific, and the role IPOI can play to bring balance of power to the region. **Mr. Alif Imran Hidayat, Researcher, Maritime Institute of Malaysia, Malaysia**, continued to deepen the discussion by commenting on ‘ASEAN’s role in maintaining a secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific’. He stated that ASEAN and Asian nations want to keep an open dialogue with China and want an inclusive Indo-Pacific strategy.



IPOI Scholar Connect attended by Mr. Michael Costa, Australia Deputy Consul for South India and moderated by Mr. K V Thomas.

As the discussion picked up more steam, bringing insights on the ASEAN outlook, **Ms. Amruta Karambelkar, Research Associate, Vivekananda International Foundation, India**, contributed by throwing light on India's perspective on Indo-Pacific and the various initiatives that India has put forth to strengthen its ASEAN Indian Ocean regions. She highlighted the need for a cohesive articulation of India's approach to the Indo-Pacific. **Dr. Harisankar K Sathyapalan, Assistant Professor at the School of Legal Studies, Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT), India and Research Fellow, CPPR**, was the fifth presenter in the round table conference who opined on the 'legal perspectives of IPOI'. He commented on the international rule of law, Indo-Pacific becoming a dream of rule-based maritime order, various (mis)uses of domestic law to justify breach of international law, and ways in which IPOI could deliver. **Mr. Lucio Blanco Pitlo III, Research Fellow at the Asia-Pacific Pathways to Progress Foundation, Philippines** focused on 'port development, shipbuilding and inter-island connectivity : opportunities for ASEAN-Australia-India cooperation in Southeast Asia'. Mr. Lucio talked about Australia and India creating infrastructure in ASEAN nations, and how collaborating on projects can bring power balance in the region.

In line with Mr. Lucio's discussion on infrastructure collaboration, **Mr. Siswanto Rusdi, Founder-Director, The National Maritime Institute, an independent Maritime Think Tank in Jakarta,**



Professor Kittti Prasirtsuk, Thammasat University, Thailand, Dr. Eric Frecon, Adjunct fellow at IRASEC (Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia, Bangkok) and Dr. Vu Hai Dang, Senior Research Fellow at Centre for International Law - National University of Singapore joining the IPOI Scholar Connect online.

Indonesia highlighted the collaboration between Indonesia and India in developing seaports. He deep dived into the 'smart port in Indonesia', and pushed for more projects the two nations could partner in to develop green innovations. **Dr. Eric Frécon, Adjunct fellow at IRASEC (Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia, Bangkok), IRSEM (Institute for Strategic Research, Paris) and at the French Naval Academy-Sorbonne** was the seventh presenter of the round table conference. He spoke on the 'maritime security: ASEAN, Australia and India' from an EU perspective. He talked about the rising sea levels affecting smaller European islands, China's growing hegemony, big brother diplomacy, and the importance of the US umbrella for maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region. **Dr. Vu Hai Dang Senior Research Fellow at Centre for International Law - National University of Singapore** commented on 'ASEAN +2 Cooperation in maritime plastic waste' and gave pragmatic suggestions to kick off ASEAN-Australia-India's Indo-Pacific Cooperation. He listed out the issues of trilateral convergence between Australia, India and ASEAN and suggestions for possible future projects like marine plastic waste management in Indonesia. The final speaker in the round table conference was **Professor Kittti Prasirtsuk, Professor of Political Science, Thammasat University,**

Thailand. His presentation summarised (in depth) the ASEAN perspectives, both negative and positive on free and open Indo-Pacific. Prof. Kitti discussed widely what ASEAN can offer to the Indo-Pacific and the way forward, keeping ASEAN's centrality in mind.

Inaugural Session

Dr. D Dhanuraj, Chairman & Managing Trustee, CPPR India, delivered the welcome remarks highlighting his thoughts on the current interests of India and the US. He stressed on the fact that AIPOI should focus on 2 key factors i.e., ensuring freedom of navigation and opening opportunities in the maritime domain. A shared interest in protecting maritime security and navy to navy co-operation. Both sides should endorse an inclusive approach. He brought to light that CPPR and Monash University were amongst the first to sign the AIPOIP grant program and would soon start maritime research under it. Starting the dialogue he introduced the panellist of the inaugural session, VAdm M P Muralidharan, Hon' Barry o'Farrell High Commissioner of Australia to India, Member of Parliament Sujeet Kumar from the state of Odisha, Dr. G Gopakumar, Michael Costa, Dr. K Riji John, and Dr. Vijay Sakhuja.



Inaugural Speech



Vice Admiral M P Muralidharan inaugurating the Conference.

Vice Admiral M P Muralidharan, ASVM & Bar, NM (Retd.), Distinguished Fellow, CPPR, delivered the inaugural address for the session highlighting the geo-location linkage of India and its orientation for trade and transport with other countries. He highlighted that the global maritime trade and commerce has significantly increased by 60% especially between ASEAN countries, Japan and Taiwan. Discussing the history of Indian maritime, he stated that India has been shaped in many ways by the seas around us. When everyone agrees to live by the code of economy, prosperity, stability and solving conflict under the guidance of the international rule of law in the Indo-Pacific region, everyone can enjoy the sea lanes which would pave the way for growth for all. Some transboundary challenges like climate change, marine pollution and exploitation of natural resources are proving to be imminent challenges. He stressed on the fact that this Project between CPPR, Monash and supported by DFAT is a much needed step to explore maritime cooperation and growth. He concluded by giving 2 key pillars for Indo-Pacific i.e., connectivity and transportation. He also added that Australia's early joining and interest of ASEAN countries bodes well for the Indo-Pacific region and all nations in that region.

Keynote Address



The inaugural speech was followed by a keynote address delivered by **Prof. (Dr.) G Gopakumar, Former Vice-Chancellor of the Central University of Kerala and an Advisor of CPPR**. Bringing to the floor his years of expertise in the field and his historical knowledge on the growth of bilateral relation of India-Australia, especially in the post-Cold war era providing opportunity to come closer together on issues such as the one pertaining to the Indo-Pacific. Maritime cooperation is a vital issue and both traditional and non-traditional aspects of maritime are significant. He suggested that the bilateral co-operation can be improved by 7 pillars of maritime cooperation in technology, trade and connectivity. Dr. G Gopakumar, pointed out that the current removal of the tariffs by the Indian government has helped in the bilateral trade with Australia. This move by India has in turn pushed away China's ambition to expand in the Australian market. He commented that with both, Australia and India are realising the significance of connecting South-East Asia and the importance of the connection of countries for maritime security and conducting trade. This is possible when there is a peaceful relation in the Indo-Pacific relations. He concluded by highlighting the importance of bilateralism and the key points of opening up of free trade which has opened up opportunities for India and the sustainable use of maritime resources which should be of paradigm importance.

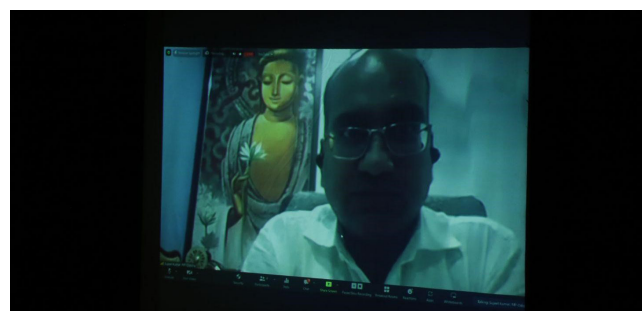
Hon'ble Barry O'Farrell, Australia's High Commissioner to India, joined the conference virtually. He talked about the convergence between the Indo-Pacific Ocean and the

emergence of Smart Ports and digital supply chain which could be the future of maritime



trade. He also showed his pleasure of seeing the ASEAN countries participate in the conference. He suggested that Australia would be proud to collaborate with India through IPOI to address issues of maritime and ocean health and would aim to deliver tangible goals to the Indo-Pacific region. He concluded by saying that the international system is becoming more multipolar. Inclusion of all regional regions can help create people to people ties. This initiative would serve as a cross-country relation and co-operation to create a maritime order.

Shri Sujeet Kumar, Member of Parliament of India (Rajya Sabha), Odisha, graced the floor virtually by shedding light on India's emerging position in the Indo-Pacific region. India, being one of the early proponents of free and open Indo-Pacific region, has a lot of economic potential and geographical advantage. He also spoke about how India has a good relationship with other countries and has maintained peace and stability in the region. With Australia as well, India has participated in initiatives like IORA.



This has given a good light to India and would be beneficial to India-Australia partnership, especially when Indo-Pacific is emerging as the great power contest. He concluded that India's participation in the free and open Indo-Pacific which will benefit open trade for all the countries.

Mr. Michael Costa, Deputy Consul General for South India at the Australian Consulate General Chennai, highlighted the importance of the dialogue and essentiality of the Indo-Pacific region and Australia's plans for bilateral and multilateral agreements with India. They have announced \$290 billion and 3 package initiatives for northeastern Indian Ocean which



are: Bay of Bengal Maritime Partnership, Bay of Bengal Connectivity Partnership, Bay of Bengal Energy Partnership. Mr. Costa, also suggested that a clear regional order can help build shared interest alone. Australia looks at India as a natural regional partner to deliver the initiatives in the region and strengthen the co-operation in the Indo-Pacific region.

Dr. K Riji John, Vice-Chancellor, Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies (KUFOS), was elated on the day-visit to the KUFOS by the delegates and speakers of the conference. He congratulated CPPR and Monash for bringing forward this research program together. Mr. John shared his concern for the importance of ocean health from the perspective of biological security, within the jurisdiction of Kerala. Some of the issues pointed out were ocean acidification, death of coral reefs, high carbon footprint that impact the ocean health on both coasts of India. Change of fishing patterns, breeding



habits of biological organisms, etc. also have an impact on ocean health. He also highlighted the fact that India's export is increasing to 48000 types of marine products and it will soon be fast-forwarding into a blue revolution. He also spoke about the stark difference in Australian export and its management and as the country quarantines most of its products being exported or imported, they are able to handle it more diligently. He concluded by saying that KUFOS would offer all support in every bilateral and multilateral cooperative initiative.

The session was concluded by **Dr. Vijay Sakhuja, Honorary Distinguished Fellow, CPPR**, after he announced the creation of a Taskforce to Support Academic-Policy Initiatives by CPPR and Monash University, to build upon their intellectual capitals to create a robust research agenda on the Indo-Pacific. The taskforce would comprise of a Chairman and nine Members who will be nominated by CPPR and Monash University in the following manner; in the first year, CPPR will nominate five members and Monash University



will nominate four Members. This will be reversed next year. The various other details about the taskforce were further discussed by Dr. Sakhuja and its new developments would be shared with all in due course of time.

Vote of Thanks



Mr. Prasant Jena, Senior Officer Operations, CPPR ended the day by giving the vote of thanks to the panellists and moderator for their remarks on the Australia-ASEAN and India's shared vision and its growing partnership in maritime trade. He appreciated the open dialogue held between the speakers who attended the event from all ASEAN countries, Australia and India and had presented their papers which would be published in the form of a book soon. He showed his gratitude towards each of the esteemed guests and the remarks by various speakers which emphasised areas of cooperation between India and Australia to advance these common goals. The IPOI Task Force which was announced during the conference is expected to help further the objectives of the Project beyond the project timeline, and initiate activities to strengthen the cooperation between the countries.

DAY 2

Continuation of the Conference

The second day of the conference consisted of 4 sessions with 13 speakers exploring IPOI in depth, the outlook of Australia, India and ASEAN nations towards IPOI, the issues and challenges IPOI will face, and an overall discussion on the initiatives the countries in the Indo-Pacific region can consider in the years to come, and the relationships that could be forged to strengthen the geopolitical and strategic standings of the countries in the region.

Session 1

Exploring Convergences on IPOI : ASEAN, Australia, India



The first session on the topic "Exploring Convergences on IPOI : ASEAN, Australian and Indian" identified issues of convergence among ASEAN, Australia and India to promote peace, security, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region. The session was chaired by **Vice Admiral MP Muralidharan, ASVM & Bar, NM (Retd.), Distinguished Fellow, CPPR**. The speakers of the session consisted of **Dr. W Lawrence S Prabhakar, Advisor CPPR, India** and **Dr. Vo Xuan Vinh, Deputy Director, Institute of SouthEast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, Hanoi, Vietnam**. The chair of the session Mr. Muralidharan opened the session by outlining the importance of the initiative that is IPOI. He stated the 7 pillars of IPOI namely maritime security; maritime ecology; maritime resources; capacity building and resource sharing; disaster risk reduction and

management; science, technology and academic cooperation; and trade connectivity and maritime technology. He introduced the two speakers of the session and invited them to share with the participants of the conference their perspectives on Indo-Pacific and IPOI.



The first speaker of the session was **Dr. W Lawrence S Prabhakar** who kicked off the discussion and laid down factors important for the foundation of co-operation between Australia, ASEAN nations and India. He commented on the converging identity formations like security convergence, constructivist identity, rule based order, confluence of seas, co-operative dialogues which can prove quintessential to build co-operation among Australia, India and ASEAN nations. The speaker went on to discuss the outlook of the Indo-Pacific by Australia, India and ASEAN nations. He commented on the importance of understanding the different outlooks in order for the nations in the region to successfully converge with each other. Dr. Lawrence pointed out that each of the outlooks/perspectives of the Indo-Pacific could be aligned with each other on various issues, which would eventually lead to growth, stability, peace, and co-operation in the region. He concluded by saying that the convergence of Australia, India and ASEAN nations would not only counter the growing Chinese hegemony but will also enhance regional integration which is the best option for the growth of the region and the nations in it.

The second and final speaker of the session was **Dr. Vo Xuan Vinh** who predominantly focused on



bringing out the perspectives of various ASEAN countries on the Indo-Pacific, and ASEAN's rebuttal to the interpretation of the Indo-Pacific collectively. He detailed the perspectives nation wise with Brunei, Laos, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam remaining silent on the usage of the term Indo-Pacific, and many of them viewing it as anti-China or a counter to China's BRI (the initiative they all support in some capacity of the other). He further mentioned that Indonesia was the only ASEAN nation which publicly supported the term Indo-Pacific, while Vietnam preferred to use the term Asia Pacific and Cambodia coming around to Indo-Pacific more, following the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy initiated by Japan. Dr. Vinh stated that FOIP could create a new regional mechanism which could marginalise ASEAN nations and erode the ASEAN centrality. He commented on ASEAN's outlook of Indo-Pacific based on the principles of strengthening ASEAN centrality, promoting openness, transparency, inclusivity, rule based framework, good governance and most importantly respect for sovereignty. He concluded by highlighting the areas of cooperation and the implications for Australia and India if they want ASEAN nations to cooperate on the Indo-Pacific. He stated that the ASEAN member states do not intend on taking sides and have clarified to China that Indo-Pacific is not a political but only a geographic term. The speaker made it crystal clear that at no point must the ASEAN centrality be threatened by the brewing great power rivalry in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions.

Session 2

Marine Litter and Debris in the Bay of Bengal

The second session chaired by **Prof. (Dr.) S Bijoy Nandan, Professor, Department of Marine Biology, Microbiology and Biochemistry & Dean, Faculty of Marine Sciences, Cochin University of Science & Technology (CUSAT)** addressed the issues of “Marine Litter in the Bay of Bengal”. The session comprised of 4 speakers namely, **Mr. Gerry Nagtzaam, Associate Professor, Monash University, Australia;** **Dr. Salom Gnana Thanga Vincent, HOD, Department of Environmental Sciences, Kerala University;** **Ms. Akansha Tiwari, Wildlife Filmmaker** and **Dr. Sali Bache, Strategic Advisor at the ClimateWorks Centre, Australia.** The session focused on the



role of technology to help identify marine debris, challenges to co-operation in the form of governance, and the national technical means to monitor and respond to marine litter. The chair Prof. (Dr.) S Bijoy Nandan commented on the growing concerns around marine litter and debris, its impact on the climate and specifically in the Bay of Bengal region. He broke the marine litter issue by defining marine litter as collection of all materials discarded by humans including plastics, and showcasing the percentage of total plastic litter (400 million tonnes globally per annum) that is recycled (9%), incarcerated (12%) and that goes into the landfills and oceans. He concluded by opening up the discussion to the speakers who went on to give further details into the issue in discussion and put forth possible solutions to address the marine environment's health concern.

The session discussion was kick started by



Mr. Gerry Nagtzaam who discussed plastic waste, the issues around plastic, steps taken to address the issue and the impact of plastic litter on the marine environment. His discussion focused mainly on the marine litter in the Bay of Bengal region which directly impacts marine life and ecology in the Indo-Pacific region. He stated that research studies found over 3 billion microplastic particulates going into the Bay of Bengal. He went on to highlight that the plastic waste impacted local fisheries which made for 4% of the global catch of 6 million tons of fish. Mr. Gerry commented on the need for more empirical data and research studies to be undertaken on the Bay region to be able to measure the growing problem, and come up with solutions. He also acknowledged the numerous bans put forth by Indian states and various treaties and resolutions signed by nations and organisations. He continued to point out that while there were multiple policies in play on eliminating plastic, none of them have been successful or focused enough to address the problem at hand. He concluded by leaving the participants with an idea of building a circular economy in every nation in order to revive Bay of Bengal's marine health and address the growing marine litter issue across the globe.



Dr. Salom Gnana Thanga Vincent, the second speaker of the session shed light on the journey plastic litter took from land to oceans. She mentioned that 80% of the plastic litter present in oceans and waterways was terrestrial and came from within 50 kilometres of the coast which comprised over 50 million people residing in that radius. She outlined the various monitoring measures like surveys, visual ship based traditional citizen approach surveys, remote sensing techniques using satellite data, optical methods, etc. Dr. Salom also discussed the management techniques that have been employed to study the marine litter and possible alternatives that nations can put to use to successfully reduce and eventually clean up the oceans of the litter.



The third speaker **Ms. Akansha Tiwari** presented to the participants of the conference her findings and learning from her experiences as a wildlife filmmaker. She discussed the stakes present in the Bay of Bengal with respect to the growing marine litter and debris. She commented on the impact of marine garbage on marine life, the evolution of marine debris into microplastics present in aquatic life and eventually in human blood vessels and organs as a result. She signified the importance of bringing all the stakeholders like scholars, experts, governments, coastal communities and leaders, to work in tandem to address the marine litter and debris problem in the Bay of Bengal region. Ms. Akansha also put forth measures like making marine related data easily accessible to all and decreasing the disparities between stakeholders and lawmakers. She concluded by giving a few possible suggestions like funding for mechanical clean of benthic and underwater trash, monitoring

and regulating of outlets of rivers into the seas, standardising the collection and cleanup drive of trash, and fishermen representing in policy creation and implementation.

The final speaker of the session was **Dr. Sali Bache**. She commented on the growing non-traditional maritime security issues. She stated that the world today is witnessing a shift in geopolitical relationships' focus from landscapes to seascapes. The conflicts today are no more territorial but water oriented. Keeping that in mind, she went on to discuss the importance of Bay of Bengal (the largest marine ecosystem), the competition of natural resources and the high level of migration taking place in and around the Bay of Bengal region due to climate change. Furthermore, Dr. Sali brought to everyone's attention the impact the marine litter will have on the 400 million people residing in the Asia - Pacific and Indian ocean regions and who depend on the coastal marine ecosystem and security. She ended the session by outlining various initiatives like BIMSTEC, Agenda 2030, and developing a sustainable blue economy.

Session 3

Smart Ports and Supply Chains in the Indian Ocean

The third session was chaired by **Dr. Vijay Sakhuja**, **Honourable Distinguished Fellow, CPPR, Former Director, National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi**. The session was on "Smart Ports and Supply Chains in the Indian Ocean". The speakers who participated in this session were **Dr. Andrew D Mitchell**, **Professor, Faculty of Law, Monash University and Affiliate Fellow, CPPR**; **Capt Martin A. Sebastian**, **Former Centre Head and Senior Fellow, Centre for Maritime Security and Diplomacy, Maritime Institute of Malaysia (MIMA)**; **Dr. R P Pradhan**, **Associate Professor, Dept. of Humanities & Social Sciences, BITS Pilani Goa Campus and Distinguished Fellow, CPPR** and **Dr. Prashant Bhaskar**, **Director, National Centre for Ports & Shipping, Australian Maritime College**. There were a range of topics covered in the session including levels of awareness about the connection between Ports-Supply chains and Industry 4.0 technologies; investment in Ports-Supply chains; capacity building through skill development, issues linked to Smart Ports and so on. Dr. Vijay Sakhuja briefly introduced the topic

of discussion, linking technology with port and trade systems. He commented on the need for some kind of human element with technology. He also talked about the need for ethics in smart technology, the impact of climate change on nations' plans of changing their ports into smart and green ports and the requirement of ports in being highly resilient with cyber security.



Panel discussion on Smart Ports and Digital Supply Chains in Session 3

The session's discussion was initiated by **Dr. Andrew D Mitchell** who described oceans as the lifeline of the global economy. He stated that 90% of the global trade was being processed through ports and cargo ships. The port system consisted of complex international trade structures and required regulation. He quoted the joint declaration of Australia and India stating that, 'the latest technology changes are essential to improve maritime operations'. With that in

mind, Dr. Andrew continued to discuss various digital technologies that could be used as a facilitator of trade led port operations relating to commercial transactions, trade finance and trade logistics. He also highlighted the importance and benefits of smart ports. He commented on various agreements like WCO Safe Framework Standards, UN Electronic Commerce, CPTTP, CEFTA, etc. In conclusion, Dr. Andrews discussed various other national and international strategies that should be leveraged to develop smart port systems successfully.



The second speaker of the session was **Captain Martin A Sebastian** who discussed with the participants on the challenges and shortcomings of smart ports. While an initiative like smart ports was geared towards improving and increasing the port led trading systems, he pointed out the problems that have come about with port systems becoming smarter and faster. He commented on the need for strengthening international security cooperation which currently is a shortcoming of smart ports. Captain Martin cited the criminality aspect that existed in the ports and supply chains systems. With only 2% of the containers being investigated in each port and ships moving faster, there has been a rise in criminal activities. He highlighted few such activities like human trafficking (crime in a box), diluted foreign materials in bottles, transporting illegal products, etc. He ended his presentation by suggesting a few policy interventions like conducting exploratory study of smart ports; engaging with smart port operators; conducting capacity building programmes with UNODC and other entities through table top exercises; and exchanging criminal supply chain information



with regional law enforcement agencies to tackle growing criminal activities in smart ports. To quote Captain Martin, “organised crimes make more money. To combat these criminals, we need to organise against organised crime”.

Dr. RP Pradhan was the third speaker who spoke broadly on the seaports and importance of smart ports. He stated that globally, it is unanimously agreed that smart ports and green shipping have a great future. The objective of smart ports is to ensure no waste of space, time, money and natural resources. The Indo-Pacific region comprises 40 countries, 2 million kilometres of coastline and 676 sea sports. This he commented makes it more crucial for seaports to be characterised more on the basis of the assets and not only on the volume it handles. Dr. Pradhan went on to discuss the impact of developing ports in different nations and its geostrategic impact on rival countries. He talked about India’s private sector partaking in the smart ports development, the SAGARMALA project, smart port agreements signed between nations, smart port case analysis of India, etc. He brought out the impact of smart ports ranging from reduction in operating costs by 25% to 55%, increase in vessel handling efficiency by 10% to 35%, reduction in port operating expenses by 15% to 35% and so on. Dr Pradhan concluded by saying that more governments should get involved in building smart ports, and not leave it to private companies alone.

Session 3 ended with its final speaker, **Dr. Prashant Bhaskar** who discussed the digital transformation of port centric supply chain issues and challenges. In order to understand the impact of technology on port systems, Dr. Bhaskar talked about

technology being utilised as a tool. He cited the example of smart ports using data analysis during the pandemic to get real time information of their ships and containers. He went on to propagate the positives of technology which provided connectivity and collaboration between port operators, port authorities, other agencies and private companies. Technology, he highlighted, also provided strategic imperatives like hinterland connectivity, supply chain orientation, etc. However while he discussed an array of positives, he brought back participants’ focus to the challenges one is faced with. Challenges like criminality, cybersecurity, workforce skilling, job scarcity if work is automated, who pays and who benefits from smart ports and so on. He, in conclusion, discussed the role IPOI can play and how they can leverage technology for building smart systems to better organise trade with nations.



Plenary Session

The final session of the conference was the plenary session chaired by **Dr. T V Paul, James**



McGill Professor of International Relations at McGill University, Canada. The plenary session comprised of three speakers namely **Amb Venu Rajamony IFS (retd.)**, Officer on Special Duty (in the rank of Chief Secretary) and Former Ambassador of India to the Netherlands and Advisor, CPPR; **Dr. Sinderpal Singh**, Assistant Director, Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS), RSIS, Singapore; and **Dr. Joshua Thomas**, Former Deputy Director of the ICSSR North Eastern Regional Centre, Shillong. Dr. TV Paul while kickstarting the plenary session commented that the Indian Ocean region needs a rival, given the importance of the Indo-Pacific as crucial to the peace in the post-Cold war era. The great rivalry in the region pertaining to India and China owes to their rising powers and the latter's tussle for hegemony. In the international system, sovereign equality system ensued, and great powers have major interests in wars as it profits their defence sector. As an alternative to China's BRI, he opined that parallel affairs by Australia, India, Japan, QUAD can counter the rising Chinese threat. He also iterated that a bipolar system in Asia must not happen and that ASEAN nations must play a greater role in bringing power stability in the region.

The first speaker **Amb Venu Rajamony IFS (retd.)**, shed light on the strength of internationalisation, the long history of contacts, exchange of ideas, religion, trade leading to foreign ties, etc., as a part of Indian history which must be further strengthened. He talked about the importance of India's foreign policy coming out with their own federal foreign policy, and opined that actions of the government must be backed by research, discussion, ideation with scholars, think tanks, and experts. He went on to give an overall idea of the reflection of foreign policy on the country whereas encouraging further investments in areas showing potential particularly South India. He exhorted international friends to focus on southern India, to channel resources and work in this region. Internationally, policies such as Act East and Sagarmala can help us build closer ties with foreign countries. Speaking about marine litter and state of marine resources, he emphasised the need for a water pollution index on the lines of the Air Pollution Index. He cited the example of the dead zone in the heart of Bay of Bengal to turn focus to the need of a regional mechanism to bring the countries together to address this problem.



Dr. Sinderpal Singh was the second speaker. He traced the difference in Indo-Pacific strategy of ASEAN with that of India or Australia, in wanting to play no leading role in the region. He stated that ASEAN nations must take the mantle of idea-maker in order to ensure a secure and safe Indo-Pacific. He emphasised that although China uses Indo-Pacific as a project to limit manoeuvrability in the region, ASEAN countries do not wholly see the threat. Further, he sought the ASEAN nations to keep a protective distance while taking decisions regarding the US and China. He also went on to suggest that India and the US must practise moderation while dealing with China's presence and influence in the region.



The third speaker, **Dr. Joshua Thomas** remarked that as global commons, oceans, especially the Indo-Pacific is a pathway to prosperity and peace. He said that India's interesting position enables linkages to south east Asia, south Asia and Asia. He also commented that India's relations with the ASEAN was crucial to engage with the Indo-Pacific and take advantage of the



opportunities it presents. He highlighted that a multipolar Indo-Pacific would be where India seeks to expand its footprint, coming out from isolation to active interaction with respect to its foreign policy. However, he stated that India must be cautious to distance itself from any groups or alliances, but enable the emergence of a new security architecture and extend its support to other countries to bring about a multipolar, multipower world. He went on to comment that the ASEAN countries are well integrated in trade and economies. It has engaged with most of the countries in the Indo-Pacific region bilaterally, regionally and multilaterally. Likewise, BIMSTEC needs to be strengthened to play a vital role in the Indo-Pacific region and addressing ASEAN nations.

Dr. Reetika Syal, Senior Officer, Research at CPPR summarised the proceedings of the conference held over the two days in the most concise and comprehensive way. She highlighted the main points of discussions from all the



sessions, and provided an overview of the two-day deliberations. The roundtable discussion revolved around the mechanisms to strengthen the co-operation between the countries in the Indo-Pacific, bring them to a common platform to work towards global peace, security, and growth. Many issues that the Indo-Pacific region faces were discussed, including strategic and security issues like the activities of China, which could be threatening to the overall security and economic growth of the Indo-Pacific. An immediate need is felt by the ASEAN member countries, of an inclusive Indo-Pacific strategy and the support of Australia and India will be a strong driving force in this regard. Adhering to international law in the region, especially with the presence of Chinese violations, is also of importance in the ASEAN and Indo-Pacific. The inaugural session set the tone for the conference, iterating the important role played by India in advancing the common interests and security and prosperity of the region. Remarks by various speakers emphasised areas of cooperation between India and Australia to advance these common goals. The IPOI Task Force which was announced during the conference is expected to help further the objectives of the Project beyond the Project timeline, and initiate activities to strengthen the co-operation between the countries.

The first session of the conference discussed convergence of identity formations which will help form the Australia-India-ASEAN identity, which will further stability and peace in the Indo-Pacific region. The speakers of the second session on marine pollution and debris in the Bay of Bengal brought out their varied perspectives and academic expertise on microplastic particles, country policies and monitoring and regulatory frameworks. The session on smart ports and supply chains brought forth the efficiency of ports, green technology, and the improvements that have taken place in the recent decades in automation, Artificial Intelligence, and connectivity with respect to supply chain. It also highlighted the need for policies, frameworks, and programmes of countries to improve risk management, supply chain security, container and vessel handling. The plenary session brought together the discussions of preceding sessions to stress topics like internationalisation, ASEAN identity and importance of smaller nations in forging the IP strategy.

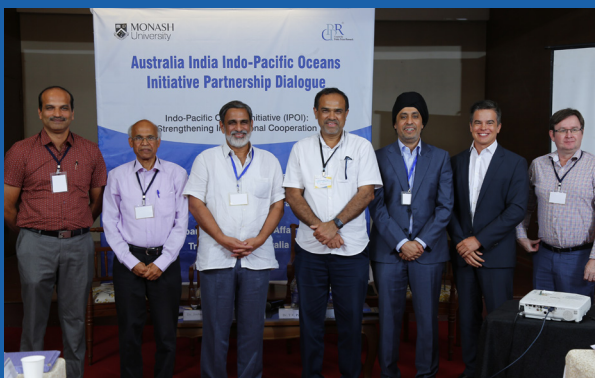


Dr. Andrew Mitchell in his concluding remarks for the conference, iterated the importance of dialogues like this to discuss multidisciplinary perspectives about the Indo-Pacific from the viewpoint of various stakeholders of the region. He is hopeful that the discussions helped the participants enlarge their understanding of the Indo-Pacific and various important issues concerning the region. He emphasised the importance of regional and interdisciplinary perspectives in international dialogues and



networking of scholars in order to strengthen the engagement between India and Australia in advancing an open, prosperous, and rules based Indo-Pacific.

Ms. Anu Maria Francis, Associate Research at CPPR gave the vote of thanks to all the delegates, and the guests from ASEAN countries, Australia, and India, and the conference concluded with group photographs.





Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR)

First Floor, 'Mandoli House, New Link Rd, opp. Metro Pillar 821, Kochi, Kerala 682020
www.cppr.in