



Indian Council of World Affairs
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Press Release

on

**The Asian Relations Conference IV
'Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific Region: Asian Perspectives'**

The Asian Relations Conference (ARC) IV, organized by the ICWA, in collaboration with the Association of Asia Scholars, on March 21-22, 2013, underscored the ascendance of Asia in the changing geo-political architecture, emergence of the 'Indo-Pacific' region as the major driver of global economic growth, and the relevance of the 'Indo-Pacific' concept for wider regional security, stability and development.



Shri Salman Khurshid, Hon'ble External Affairs Minister, delivering the Keynote Address

Hon'ble External Affairs Minister, Shri Salman Kurshid, delivered the keynote address, highlighting India's relations with South East, East Asia and beyond under its 'Look East Policy'. He noted that Asia was faced with the challenging task of evolving a transparent, open, and balanced regional architecture, both in the economic and security arenas. Ambassador Rajiv K. Bhatia, Director General, ICWA, described, in his inaugural address, the shared history of Asian states, particularly the maritime dimension of their relations and the significance of the Indo-Pacific region consequent upon Asia's resurgence. Prof. Swaran Singh, President, Association of Asia Scholars (AAS), also dwelt on the geo-political salience of the Indo-Pacific region and the prominent role of China and India therein.

The two-day Conference dealt with various aspects of the subject, including the linkages between the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific regions; various approaches to the concept of 'Indo-Pacific', viz. constructivist, balance of power, power shift and strategic autonomy choices; the increasing political, strategic, and economic engagement between the

Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean countries and the freedom of commons in the region. The interests of other stakeholders, such as the US, Russia, and the EU were also identified, especially in the context of China's burgeoning power. At the six thematic sessions of the Conference, twenty-six panellists, including from the US, Russia, Australia, China, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Seychelles, Tanzania, Mauritius, and Germany provided a wide variety of perspectives on the shifting dynamics of the region and its crucial role in the global economic and commercial relations, as well as political and strategic realms.

The participants from Southeast Asia and East Asia underlined the growing trade in the region, commonality of interests, and the necessity of promoting shared responsibility in Southeast Asia. The participant from U.S. held that the future of world progress was anchored in the Asia-Pacific region. The practical measures and policies that the US had adopted were not intended to contain or balance China. For the Russian participant, 'Asia-Pacific' was more significant and relevant than the concept of 'Indo-Pacific'. He remarked that it would be desirable for India to play a greater role in the region, for "a more stable strategic equilibrium". Economic opportunities, maritime trade, energy security, and stability were Russia's priorities and the country did not wish Indo-Pacific region to become a Sino-US conflict zone. The German participant noted that Indo-Pacific was only an 'analytic concept' and not a political one for the EU countries. Eleven countries amongst E.U.'s largest trade partners were in the Indo-Pacific region, with which E.U. had extensive commercial ties.

A variety of Indian perspectives, articulated on the subject, were marked by a common theme that the rise of China, India, and Africa was reflected by the 'Indo-Pacific' concept. The Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean were interconnected, opening new vistas for peace, development and stability. Under India's chair, the IOR-ARC, a grouping of twenty countries from the Indian-Ocean's rim,



Amb. Rajiv Bhatia, DG, ICWA with the Chair and panellists



Panellists during a session

was seeking a more dynamic profile.

Ambassador Rajiv Bhatia, DG, ICWA expressed optimism, in his concluding remarks, that the Indo-Pacific region would witness partnerships for peace and co-operation in the future. Shri Sanjay Singh, Secretary(East), Ministry of External Affairs, noted in his valedictory address that the wider Indo-Pacific region – home to nearly three billion people and a combined GDP of around \$20 trillion and having three of the four largest economies in the world i.e. China, India and Japan – was a reflection of the contemporary realities. His views echoed the broad consensus of the Conference.
