

# Quad talks Indo-Pacific; Vietnam envoy says against military tie-up

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AFTER THE third meeting of the Quadrilateral grouping, India on Thursday said the four countries reaffirmed the ASEAN centrality as the cornerstone of a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific.

However, in Delhi, the Vietnam envoy was non-committal in backing the "Quad" or quadrilateral coalition among India, the US, Japan and Australia, saying it welcomes any initiative to bring peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region but is opposed to the formation of any military alliance.

Vietnam's newly-appointed envoy Pham Sanh Chau also emphasised on the need to maintain peace, security, stability and freedom of navigation in South China Sea, adding his country does not want the region to be a "theatre" of power play by major powers. "Vietnam welcomes any initiative for maintenance of peace, security, freedom of navigation and overflight in the region. However, we do not want to see a military alliance formed because we believe that it is not conducive to the security environment in the region," he told reporters. The envoy was asked whether Vietnam supports the quadrilateral coalition. "If any country wants to gang up, use force or trying to use force, then it goes against the position of Vietnam," he said.

However, after the meeting — the Quad was revived in November last year after a decade — the Ministry of External Affairs said the "four countries

agreed to partner with other countries and forums in the region to promote a free, open, rules-based and inclusive order in the Indo-Pacific that fosters trust and confidence. They committed to strengthening connectivity and quality infrastructure based on sovereignty, equality and territorial integrity of all nations, as well as transparency, economic viability and financial responsibility". "The discussions focused on cooperation in areas such as connectivity, sustainable development, counter-terrorism, non-proliferation and maritime and cyber-security..." MEA said in its statement.

While the Indian statement said the officials exchanged views on recent developments in the regional situation, Japan and US statements said they discussed the situation in Maldives and Sri Lanka. Japan's statement said the four countries reaffirmed a shared commitment to maintain a rules-based order in Indo-Pacific in which all nations are sovereign and prosperous. Australia's statement said they discussed "complementary visions for the Indo-Pacific held by their four countries which each strive for an open, prosperous and inclusive region in which international law, freedom of navigation and overflight and the rights of all states are respected".

The US said they highlighted "complementary visions for the region held by their four countries, grounded in a shared support for a free, open and inclusive region that fosters universal respect for international law, freedom of navigation and overflight, and sustainable development".



PM Narendra Modi with his Singaporean counterpart Lee Hsien Loong during the ASEAN-India Informal Breakfast Summit, in Singapore, on Thursday. PTI