

India to brief China, Russia on its new Indo-Pacific policy

New Delhi: India will embark on some intensive diplomatic engagement to explain its newly minted policy on the Indo-Pacific. In the coming weeks, India will hold the second round of maritime dialogue with China and the first such dialogue with Russia, which are expected to focus on this.

Narendra Modi's speech at the Shangri-la Dialogue laid out the contours of the Indian policy, where he drew the geographies encompassed in the policy as a space extending "from the shores of Africa to that of the Americas."

The Indian vision of the "free, open, and inclusive" Indo-Pacific region emphasises a "common rules-based order" that respects "sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as equality of all nations." It situated the Asean in the centre of the policy, while highlighting "the importance of freedom of navigation and connectivity."

Within a couple of days India, Australia, Japan and US held the second round of the Quadrilateral dialogue, building on an informal grouping that shares the greatest strategic convergences on the issue of the Indo-Pacific. But while the speech received some positive feedback, there were a number of questions that India felt needed to be answered. New

Delhi also felt it was important to scotch the negative diplomacy that was being spread by both China and Russia against the Indo-Pacific policy in general and the Quad in particular. India's conversations with Indonesia were intended to plug this particular perception.

A second conversation with France was held to deepen the convergences there. Unlike the Quad, the India-France maritime relationship is older, and

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many say, deeper, particularly after the two sides signed a logistics agreement earlier this year.

India has also reached out to eastern African countries to explain the Indo-Pacific policy, particularly because India's vision touches the eastern shores of Africa. But engaging China and Russia have a different dimension. China, having conflated the Indo-Pacific policy with the Quad has been at the forefront of a contesting narrative that holds the Indo-Pacific to be essentially a joint approach by the Quad to dominate politics in the south-east Asian region. This approach has found resonance with the Russians, which is one reason why India and Russia are having a similar dialogue, even though Russia isn't an Indo-Pacific power at all, with negligible presence in this region.