

QUAD DISCUSSES CHINA MOVES, COVID VACCINE

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

Senior officials in Foreign Ministries of Quad group.

Shared concerns over China's moves in both the Indian Ocean Region and Pacific Island countries, as well as the situation in Sri Lanka, came up during the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) of Quad countries, that ended on Tuesday in Delhi, diplomatic sources told *The Hindu*. The meeting, which reviewed projects agreed to by leaders of Australia, India, Japan and the U.S. during the Quad Summit in Tokyo this year, and set the course for a Ministerial-level meeting of the four countries, due to be held in India next year, also held discussions on Quad proposals like the vaccine initiative that has run into trouble over the past year, as well as cooperation on emerging technologies, infrastructure funding for Indo-Pacific countries. and projects to counter climate change in vulnerable regions.

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said in a tweet that the officials discussed: "regional & global developments, reaffirming their vision for a free, open & inclusive Indo-Pacific".

Meanwhile, both S. Jaishankar and Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong addressed the Delhi-based Australia-India Leadership Dialogue, an annual conference run by the Australia India Institute (AII), via video messages on Tuesday.

"The Quad has emerged as a key platform for ensuring progress, prosperity, stability and security. We are also engaged in advancing the realisation of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. Along with Japan, we are working on promoting supply chain resilience," Mr. Jaishankar said.

The Minister said that it was in the "realm of politics and strategy" that the India-Australia transformation in ties has been the "sharpest" in recent years. "Much of the growing convergence has been driven by concerns about the region's stability, prosperity and security," he added in a veiled reference to tensions with China and concerns over Beijing's growing influence in the island nations near India and Australia.

According to officials, the Quad SOM, the first meeting of the grouping since the Taiwan crisis, spoke about the need to share information on possible security concerns in Indo-Pacific maritime sphere, and "maintaining the rule-based global order". However, officials said that it was "erroneous" to portray the discussions as seeking to "counter or contain" China.

The sources said that problems for the Quad vaccine initiative, that had been announced in March 2021, were also discussed briefly. As *The Hindu* had reported in May 2022, the original plan to manufacture one billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines, including the Johnson & Johnson vaccine by the end of 2023, has run aground over India's refusal to give an indemnity waiver for the American-developed vaccines, as well as shrinking demand for the vaccines as the Indo-Pacific countries have completed their COVID-19 inoculation schedules. An official present at the meeting said that the Quad SOM had discussed a repurposing of the initiative for cooperation in future pandemic situations. "The important point is to build joint capacity to deal with future challenges — in that sense our efforts have not been useless," the official told *The Hindu*, on condition of anonymity.

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