



India's Engagement with Pacific Island Countries: A Comprehensive Analysis

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Abstract

India's engagement with the Pacific Ocean is not a recent phenomenon. The ancient Indian historical linkages are to be considered here to make a comprehensive analysis viewing on geo-strategic aspects. This paper would like to make an analysis of India's interests and the significant changes which has been observed in contemporary times. It should be clear that India's aspirations and steeps towards the Pacific zone has come up with some geo-political and geo-economic goals which not only deals with the big powers but also with the Islands of the zone. Over and above the recent trends of the India's foreign policy towards small Island countries are to be considered here with special emphasis on security perspective. India's position on 'Act East' policy is the basis of the study and the intention of the paper is to highlight on the dynamism of India's diplomacy by surviving the glorious history of the country Herself.

Key Words: Geo-politics, Act East, Look East, Geo-strategy, National interest

Introduction

India as a sub-continent of Asia has a history of maritime linkages with the countries of Pacific Ocean from the ancient period. This relation carrying the heritage and the maritime history on today. Religious identity and trade between India and the countries of the Pacific Ocean had have a deep impact on present days scenario. People belonging to the Island countries of Southeast Asia and Far Eastern countries of the Indian origin has developed the diasporic connections which we can't ignore. The impact of the historical glimpses surrounded in the Indo-Pacific zone is to be important to consider for the following discussion on India's attitude towards Pacific Ocean in recent years. Besides the big powers' existence, the relevance of the small Islands has to be identified. The American hegemony, the neo-colonial attitudes of Australia and New Zealand, theory of expansion of China all have the records, which is also very interesting to understand the strategic gesture of the Pacific zone to trace out the Indian involvement in the pursuing analysis. However, the paper has an intention to clarify the present days scenario of the concerned issues regarding India and Pacific Zone, even then the historical root is too important to understand the geo-strategic investigation.

Section: A

The maritime history of India is date back at about 6000 years with the birth of the art of navigation and navigating in the time of Indus Valley Civilization. Later on, the evolution of maritime trade and the cultural exchanges with Middle East and the Southeast Asia has been recorded in the ancient history of India. It has been found that during five to ten AD, the Kalinga and the Vijayanagara Empires conquered Western Java, Sumatra and Malaya. All most at the same time the Chinese naval explosion had also found in the history. The

Andaman and Nicobar Islands of Bay of Bengal were served as an important halt point for trade ships enroute to the nations of Southeast Asia. In between nine hundred eighty-four AD and one thousand forty-two AD the Chola dynasty had started their naval expansion and trade under the leadership of Raja Raja Chola I and it was followed by Rajendra Chola I with his successor Kulothunga Chola I. They captured the lands of Burma, Sumatra, Sri Lanka with Malaya. With a look to the naval history of ancient India shows that throughout the millennium starting from the second century BC, the Empires were engaged for their out reached. Among them the Pallavas, the Chalukyas, the Kalingas, the SriVi, tayam kings, the Shailendras, the Chelas, the Cholas and the Pandyas were famous. They actually down to the Vijaya Nagar Empire and created a maritime influence in the area. The Emperors at that time were known as the traders and also the supporters of navigation, science and technology and mathematical interpretations. Basically, the ancient Indian Ocean maritime history had been the key to connect the East and West by exchanges and civilizational imperative with the Indian naval exposition. However, the Chinese maritime route was also to be considered but the Indian influence particularly towards Java and Sumatra in the East and Zanzibar in the West has to be taken here. Specially the Chola dynasty secured the sea trade to China along with Indonesia in the East. The historical maritime linkages had not been only for the trade but it was also the main connection for the flourishing of Indian cultural and religious identity towards the East. In the ancient history of Asia, it has been found that Indian culture and religion had been spread out in the countries like, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia along with the East Asian countries of China, Japan and Korea. The Buddhism and Hinduism had a deep impact on the culture and heritage of these countries which are still follows. The ideas of the Upanishads and the Ramayana, the stories of Panchatantra, the Indian numerals and the decimal system thus could reach there. The spices, muslin and other merchandise were taken from India to different countries.

Indian Art forms had reached in Sri Lanka, where the themes, the styles, paintings, dance forms, architecture, the folklores, were taken along with the Buddhism. King Ashoka had sent his son Mahendra and daughter Sanghamitra to Sri Lanka to spread the message of Buddha. Basically, Sri Lanka became a strong hold of Buddhism where Pali is their literary language. "India which was the home of Theravada Buddhism lost its base due to the arrival of Islam. The rapid spread of Buddhism in west Asia posed a threat to the existence of new religion of Islam and Buddhism earned the hostilities from Islam in Asia and even the Hinduism of Gupta era also opposed the dominance of Buddhism in India. Buddhism was more successful in East Asia." In searching of the adopters of Theravada Buddhism outside India, it has been found that the countries of Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam and Sri-Lanka still follow Theravada Buddhism that descended from first "Sthavira" tradition of Buddha through the first, second and third Buddhist council held in Rajgriha, Vaisalii and Patliputra. It is also to be important to say that the tribes in ancient times mentioned in Mahabharata are as follows, the "Kirata", the "Kinnara" and the "Naga". The Nagas and Rakshasas are regarded by some ancient authors as earlier habitants of India. Rakshasas lived in south India and Sri-Lanka. The famous epic Ramayana had also referred "Lanka" as a place of war between Sri Ram and Ravana, which is connected with present day's India. In Southeast Asia starting from Myanmar, the people and culture of India began to reach there in the beginning of the Christian era.

Myanmar is situated on the route to China and in Pagan was a great centre of Buddhist culture from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. It is still famous for its magnificent Pagodas. They also developed their own Pali language and translated both Buddhist and Hindu scriptures in their version of Pali. Thailand was called Siam, which was its original name, was till used to 1939. Historians have found that the Indian cultural influences began to reach in Thailand in the first century AD. It was first carried by Indian traders, followed by teachers and missionaries. The Thai kingdoms were given Sanskrit names such as Dwaravati, Shrivijay,

Sukhodaya and Ayutthiya. The names of their cities also indicate a strong cultural interflow of India. Brahminical images and Buddhist temples began to be constructed in third and fourth century AD. The earliest images found from Thailand are those of Lord Vishnu, where as the Cambodians constructed huge monuments and embellished them with sculptural representations of Shiva, Vishnu. Buddha and other divinities from Indian Epics and the Puranas have a great impact there. The episodes from these texts were chosen by the kings to symbolise great historical events. Sanskrit remained their language for administration till the fourteenth century. The famous kingdoms of Champa (Annam) and Kamhuja (Cambodia) were ruled by the kings of Indian origins. The history of deep-rooted cultural relationship between India and Cambodia goes back to the first and second centuries AD. In the discussion of the order of Indian cultural and religious identity found in ancient time in Southeast Asia, Vietnam was also included. The people of Champa (in Vietnam) are famous as Cham. They built a large number of Hindu and Buddhist temples. The Cham people worshipped Shiva, Ganesha, Saraswati, Lakshmi, Parvati, Buddha and Lokeswara. Images of these deities and Shivalingas were housed in the temples. Most of the temples are in ruin now. According to an article on the Buddhism in early Southeast Asia, a general survey has shown that of the cultural features transmitted to Southeast Asia from the earliest periods of Buddhist expansion up to about the twelfth to fourteenth century, placing emphasis on Indonesia particularly Sumatra and Java. "Between 1025 and 1050, the Hindu kingdom of the Cholas was transformed into a raiding naval power capable of challenging the maritime hegemony of the Buddhist kingdom of Srivijaya, which had dominated seaborne commerce between India and China through its control of the Malacca and Sunda Straits. Although the Chola invasion of Southeast Asia proved to be unsuccessful in the end, it served to dislocate Srivijayan authority and enable the formation of new Indianized successor states (such as Sighasari and Majapalit) based upon intensive agriculture rather than maritime trade. Having said that, and probably more important than the naval campaigns from southern India, what ultimately decided the fate of Srivijaya was the extra-regional pressure of Chinese shipping."

The contact between India and China began around the 2nd Century B.C. Indian culture first entered China with two monk scholars—Kashyapa Martanga and Dharmarakshita who went to China in AD 67 on the invitation of the Chinese Emperor Ming Ti. After Kashyapa Martanga and Dharmarakshita, there was a continuous flow of scholars from India to China and from China to India. It was observed that the Chinese were a highly cultured people and they listened to the thrilling stories of the Buddha with great attention. The Chinese who came in search of wisdom wrote about India and the Indian culture to such an extent that today they are the most important sources of Indian history. Buddhism in the form of religion had become such an eminent figure that people began to worship him in China and Japan. The story of Indian culture in Japan is believed to go back to more than fifteen hundred years, whereas the earliest historical evidence of Indian culture going to Japan is from 552 AD. At that time, the Korean Emperor sent a Buddhist statue, sutras, instruments for worship, artists, sculptors, painters and architects as gifts for the Japanese Emperor. And soon after Buddhism was given the status of State Religion. Thousands of Japanese became monks and nuns. Sanskrit was accepted as the sacred language in Japan. Being a near neighbouring country, Korea received Indian cultural elements through China. Sundo was the first Buddhist Monk who entered Korea, carrying a Buddha image and sutras in 352 AD. He was followed by Acharya Mallananda, who reached there in 384 AD. After that, in 404AD, an Indian monk built two temples in the Pyongyang city in Korea. He was followed by a number of teachers from India. They brought philosophy, religion, the art of making images, painting, and metallurgy. Later on, many scholars came to India from Korea in search of knowledge. They were trained in astronomy, astrology, medicine and in several other fields of knowledge.

Section: B

Given this context of the historical connection of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean with India, further discussions can be held. According to the geo-strategic position, India's political relations with the countries in the South East and East Asia are as significant as India's relations with the small Island countries in the Pacific Ocean, which are now at the centre of the discussion. But before discussing India's relations with the Pacific Ocean, one can go to the context of Southeast Asia. In the Cold war period India have had the policy of pro-western in a general sense. India does not have a strong and comprehensive bondage with the Pacific Ocean island countries. Among the fourteen Pacific island countries, India has only two High Commissions; in Fiji, because of its sizable Indian diaspora, and Papua New Guinea, because of trade and minerals. "The Fiji lens has been limiting for India. Former prime ministers Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi both visited Fiji during the 1980s and urged the Indian-Fijian community to uphold and abide by the Constitution of their country. However, as one former Indian diplomat in Fiji noted, because the Constitution itself enshrined racial segregation, crisis was inevitable." The bilateral relations between India and Tonga is remarkable. India's involvement in the independent movement of the then East Pakistan in 1971, was highly appreciated and recognized by Tonga in 1972. On the contrary the then Indian President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, acknowledged Tonga's leadership role in the South Pacific at a 1976 banquet for His(late) Majesty King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV of Tonga. The King greatly admired India's drive for economic independence and modernization and also India's military tradition. He was a great friend of India, as reported in the Hindustan Times in 2006 when the King passed away. Not only that, many in a whole generation of Tonga women are named "Indira" in fond remembrance of Indira Gandhi's visit to Tonga in 1981.

In the Post-Cold war years, the strategy has started to move forward on the way of Southeast and East Asia. India's Look East Policy has announced in 1990s' under the leadership of the then Prime Minister Sri P.V.Narasimha Rao. The declaration of India's Look East Policy of the 1990s' is now extended to India's Act Policy introduced in 2014. At the same time India's biggest challenge for her work on 'grand strategy' that includes economic cooperation, political engagement and strategic interest could be a significant step forward in India's emergence as a maritime power in the Indian Ocean region and the Indo-Pacific. There is no doubt that the regional security environment in Indo-Pacific is complex and multilayered. The geographical proximity is also allowing with the hegemonic presence of China and its complex relations with individual ASEAN countries. The ASEAN is in a dilemma about handling with the Chinese threat as the presence of Chinese posturing in the South China Seas, and also its heavy economic dependence on China compels it to adopt for constructive engagement. In case of India's role in this zone, has an opportunity to make its closer ties with Southeast Asian countries in considering her security perspective. A powerful India in balancing with China and cordial relations with the USA, Japan and Australia could contribute significantly to the stability of the region. India's Act East Policy is actually running with a geo-strategic intention of security and economic prosperity as well. During a visit to Australia in August 2009, the then Indian External Affairs Minister S. M. Krishna acknowledged the need to deepen ties with Pacific Ocean and he said: "We are confident that the 'Look North' policy of the Pacific countries and the 'Look East' policy of India will dovetail to create new synergies, as Pacific Island Countries are rich in natural resources and there is vast potential for cooperation in diverse spheres...Cooperation between India and these countries is a necessary prerequisite for the 21st century to become the century of the Asia Pacific." Later on, India's former Ambassador to Myanmar, Rajiv Bhatia, conducted a workshop on diplomacy for government officials from 12 Pacific Island Countries, as part of a technical assistance programme of the Indian government in the year 2011 at Fiji. Sri Bhatia said that the time was right for India to develop a "comprehensive" policy towards the countries of the South Pacific, to harness

opportunities that will ensure Indian security, growth, and the interests of its citizens in the area. At that time India's direct trade and investment in the Pacific was very poor in real sense, other than India's commercial relations in Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Fiji. In case of other island countries of the Pacific Ocean was based on the annual development aid of \$125,000 and five training slots has found under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC).

In November 2014, During the visit of Prime Minister Modi to Fiji the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) was launched and India had offered some major assistance projects. The projects offered include the setting up of a special USD one million fund for adapting to climate change and clean energy, establishing a trade office in India, Pan Pacific Islands e-network to improve digital connectivity, extending visa on arrival at Indian airports for all the fourteen Pacific Island countries, cooperation in space technology applications for improving the quality of life of the islands, and training to diplomats from Pacific Island countries. In addition, India has increased the annual "Grant-in-Aid" from USD 125,000 to 200,000 to each of the 14 Pacific Countries (Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu) for community projects of their choice, and launched a new Visitors Programme for Pacific Island Countries. In an address in Shangri La Dialogue in 2018 Prime Minister Modi stated, "The human-kind now looks to the Rising East, with the hope to see the promise that this 21st Century beholds for the whole world, because the destiny of the world will be deeply influenced by the course of developments in the Indo-Pacific region.... To the East, the Malacca Strait and South China Sea connect India to the Pacific and to most of our major partners - ASEAN, Japan, Republic of Korea, China and the Americas." He stressed the commitment of India to the ASEAN-India Summit and the centrality of the ASEAN in India's Act East Policy.

Section: C

The Pacific Island Countries (PICs) are scattered over a broad expanse of ocean and are divided among three sub-regions—Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia. The United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, France, and the United States traditionally have played key security and economic roles in the region. They are rich in resources and has therefore been on the radar of countries like the US, Japan, Korea, China, Russia, Australia and Indonesia in recent years. Australia and New Zealand have dominated regional cooperation forums such as the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). The Pacific Islands Forum is the region's main political and economic policy organization. It has 18 members: Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. The organization has aimed to promote regional interests while maintaining good relations with the United States and its friends and allies in the region (particularly Australia and Japan) on the one hand, and China, on the other. Where the Forum for India-Pacific Islands cooperation (FIPIC) fourteen Pacific Island countries. i.e., the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. Most of these countries have large Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), which are not yet demarcated, and have an interest in mitigating climate change effects, marine resources, fisheries and developing a blue economy. Some, such as Papua New Guinea, are relatively large with extensive natural resources. Others, such as Tuvalu, are very small, low-lying coral atoll nations with limited economic prospects and critical vulnerability to the current and expected effects of climate change and sea level rise. Many PICs rely on fisheries, tourism, and remittances for revenue. Basically, the initiative taken by the Indian Government to reconnect the Pacific Ocean islands is one of the major issues in recent times. According to India's maritime strategy the fourteen island countries of

the Pacific Ocean are being included in the greater Indian Ocean policy. There is no doubt about it that the Indo-Pacific zone is more important to securing India's maritime issue and also for blue economy. The upgraded form of "Rising India" presently known as "Emerging India" is also highlighting India's maritime security strategy. Formation of FIPIC in November, 2014 at Fiji is one of the big achievements of the Government of India under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In recent years, each country has proposed its own "vision" for the Indo-Pacific, India views the Indo-Pacific as a geographic and strategic expanse, with the ASEAN connecting the two great oceans. To promote its strategic interests in the Indian Ocean, India launched the SAGAR (Security and growth for All in the Region) vision. India's extended Act East policy is actively promoting good relations with smaller island nations of the South Pacific, along with heavyweights in the region, and cooperating on multiple issues which include blue economy (ocean-based economy), oil and natural gas, mining, IT, health care, fishing and marine research. India's space collaboration with Pacific countries is of vital for her national interest. Basically, India geared towards deepening economic engagement with Southeast Asia and broader cooperation with East Asia and the Pacific Island countries. In an ASEAN summit the Indian Prime Minister Modi proposed an "Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative" for the safety, security and stability of the maritime domain.

The Pacific Island countries are highly diverse in political status, population, development, migration prospects and potential for instability. Among this diversity, some key common challenges have been short out, which are basically denotes the vulnerability of the Islands. Along with economic vulnerability, democracy, urbanization, immigration, health and health systems, gender relations and governance are the main challenges here. In an overall observation over the Islands, a general idea has been developed which shows that, resilience is most under challenge in western Melanesia. Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu are states-in – formation characterized by extraordinary linguistic and group diversity giving rise to weak consciousness of nationhood. Health systems vary in effectiveness across the region and are least effective in Papua New Guinea, where elections continue to be dominated by money politics. On the contrary, Fiji is different, as the state is strong but a weak democratic system is continuing since independence. Nauru has recently lurched towards authoritarianism. Increasing tensions, disputes and violence over the land in Pacific urban areas are not a recent phenomenon. People's traditional connections with rural villages diminish and landlessness becomes more common problems. Women are not safe in their daily life in many Pacific countries. Routinely constrained by fear of men make a high-level personal insecurity of women. Problems of migration has also added in this list. The 'New Chinese' in the region tend to be resented, and the potential for a return to conflict between Pacific Islands and Chinese remains.

The Pacific Ocean bears the largest ecosystem in the world, covering almost half the globe's sea surface. Agriculture is the backbone of the Pacific Island economies and it is the main source of livelihood for the population as well as a major export earner. Smallness and remoteness of the Pacific Island countries has hindered their economic development in the world economy. It constitutes a major constraint. The limited land available for agricultural activities produces little for local consumption and sale to the domestic and export markets. Financing agricultural development is also very limited and traditional production methods are still being used. The remote location of the Pacific Island countries from the international markets is mainly responsible for high transportation costs for exports, and high distribution and marketing costs also. This results in Pacific Island exporters becoming mainly price takers in the international markets. Vulnerability to external shocks in the world markets greatly affects agriculture exports and the worst hit are people in the rural areas, where most of the agricultural activities take place. Found high vulnerability to natural disasters such as cyclones, droughts and rising sea level complemented by increasing pests and diseases have significantly

slowed down economic growth of most of these economies of Pacific Island countries, which are also responsible for cutting their level of development back by ten years. According to a report of IUCN of Switzerland in 2010, fishing and tourism sectors in the region are estimated to provide US\$3.3 billion to the national economies in the Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs), or more than 10% of the regional GDP. The ocean-based activities are providing revenues and income for Pacific societies. “Unsustainable and unregulated use puts the ocean systems at risk which has strong negative impact on economic activities that rely on functioning ocean systems.” Therefore, Ocean health is inextricably linked to ocean wealth as are the people who depend on and value the use of the resources of the zone. “Ocean health can only be maintained or achieved if urgent action towards sustainable region-wide use is taken.”

The primary interests of the major maritime players are divergent and brought to some extent by US alliances in East Asia. The quadrilateral position of US-Australia-Japan-India is to be mentioned here. In case of China, it appears alone and have strategic interests in virtually all sub-regions, which is basically connecting with the China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It is needless to say that this initiative taken by China is highly ambitious plan for her expansion. Experts like Michael Powles observed that the rise of China as a major power. China’s ambition not only to be a predominant Asia-Pacific regional power, but also a major global power projecting as the driving force behind changes in the Pacific Islands security environment. Watching more Chinese activity in terms of movement of people, trade and cultural exchanges in the Pacific region than ever before has pointed out a legitimate question of its resumption of great power status that could be effective on the impact on the region’s strategic environment. On the other hand, the US’s general goodwill and political capital in the region is not endless. The diplomatic and economic initiatives have found with high level U.S. participation at the Pacific Islands Post-Forum dialogue and the Trans-Pacific Partnership programme. But there has been a gap between rhetoric and reality.

The relationship between the Pacific islands and the region’s ‘bigger brother’ Australia and New Zealand is often seen in two dimensional terms with the latter appearing to act in concert and in terms characterized by underling neo-colonial attitudes and a determination to dominate the regional agenda. Being a colonial power found in the history of the zone, both are the major aid donors in the region and at the same time have powerful hegemonic role because of geopolitical entity and also playing important role as the members of the Pacific Island Forum (PIF). Australia’s lies in the Melanesian sub-region and New Zealand’s in western Polynesia. Micronesian countries are also Forum members, but the links for most are closer to the US. Some experts say that, Australia may not always be the Pacific Islands region’s most influential player from an economic perspective, but it is the Pacific Islands region’s “indispensable” power from a security perspective. On the contrary perspective from Australia and New Zealand, the forlines of the neighbouring island countries of Melanesia and Western Polynesia in particular are clearly important, not least with respect to their security implications. In recent years the Forum has attracted delegations from China, US, the EU and the UN, signaling considerable interests in the region.

India is basically concerned with the Indian Ocean, where categorically she prioritizing the zone with a distinct direction. Observation finds out that, the South East Asia and South China Sea is getting more important in comparison with East Asia and the East China Sea along with the Southern Pacific. But in the recent years India’s extended Act East Policy is giving attention on the fourteen island countries of the Pacific Ocean. The theoretical experts say, it is better to understand the strategy of India’s Ocean policy as a whole are lying on four major dimensions, i.e., the balance of power model, the dialogue and cooperation focused model, existing initiative in the Indian Ocean and shaping structures to realize India’s Indian Ocean vision. The

extended Act East Policy (AEP) is aspiring to engage at a broader level with other major powers active in the region, in addition to ASEAN member countries. It's true in a sense that India's economic and security interests in the Indo-Pacific region are closely interrelated. Therefore, India's maritime issues are framing in a large scale. Besides economic, political, social and environmental factors the non-traditional security threads such as transnational crime, terrorism, arms smuggling, human trafficking, piracy at sea, money laundering, terrorist financing and cybercrime have a space in India's security concerned area. In another security perspective the undeniable ascendancy of China's economic, political and security clout are also major area of concerned for geostrategic policy for India. In defining India's role in the Indo-Pacific, Prime Minister Modi stated in the Sangri La Dialogue that, "Our trade in the region is growing rapidly. And, a significant part of our overseas investments flow in this direction. ASEAN alone accounts for over 20%." On the other side at the Biketawa Plus Security Declaration Workshop in Suva, Fiji. Meg Taylor DBE, Secretary General, Pacific Islands Forum said, "...the region is becoming increasingly crowded and complex. We are seeing the growing interest in our region from both traditional and non-traditional partners, including civil society and private donors. Some view the arrival of non-traditional partners into the region as a security risk. Others see this as an opportunity for Pacific Islands Countries to benefit from new relationships. Some argue that this interest by non-traditional partners is fueling a renewed interest by our traditional partners in our region." In the recent year 2018-19, total annual trade of amounted to \$275.3 million between India and Pacific Island countries, whereas exports are around \$119.82 million, and imports are around \$ 155.12 million. Plastics, Pharmaceuticals, sugar, apparels and textiles, surgical instruments are the items for major exports from India to the Pacific Islands, while India imports mineral fuels & ores, wood and wood charcoal, precious stones, ships. Basically, the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) has denoted the potential sectors of cooperation between India and Pacific Islands. These are pharmaceuticals, pharma machinery and tools, plastics, minerals and fuels, tourism, education, skill development and capacity building, oil and natural gas, IT, disaster management and agriculture.

The friendliness and positive attitude towards equality and also the diasporic sentiment these all are the positive side of Indian steps to be a big partner of the Pacific island countries. Despite of the big power politics and a geographical distance, India has chosen the path for a bright and secured future using her glorious cultural history in this zone. Therefore, it seems to comments on India's involvement in the Pacific Ocean is lying on the fact that, India and the Pacific Island Countries are natural partners that only need the right bridge to come together to make a comprehensive and more economically, politically, and strategically strong bondage for greater and secured Indo-Pacific zone.

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