

Pacific Islands: A Regional Edifice for Japan and India's Collective Footprint

Monika Chansoria*

Abstract

The rapidly transient politico-strategic developments across the Indo-Pacific are witnessing its regional architecture getting challenged by virtue of capacity constraints, alternative forms of regionalism and security, new versions of “aid” paradigms and the far-reaching implications of them all. Despite their limited national landmass, the Pacific Island nations have huge exclusive economic zones (EEZ) and remain an important route for transporting products and natural resources. The Pacific Islands being an important partner in the regional maritime paradigm provides India and Japan with a “Third Regional Avenue” following South Asia and Africa, in providing cooperative security and collaborating towards its sustainable growth and development. This would not only be beneficial to limit the overwhelming detrimental impact of “influence aid,” but also provide viable and tangible alternatives to accentuate bilateral benefits and reciprocity as a model case. Japan and India need to focus on specialized projects while responding to the needs of the Pacific Islands. A robust and targeted approach focusing on niche projects tailored to the interests of the Pacific Islands would be ideal. The fields of joint exploration and research for access to deep-sea minerals and renewable energy initiatives should be of congruent interests to both Japan and India. This consequently falls in line with the vision to create a free and open Indo-Pacific region linking the African continent with India and countries in South, Southeast Asia, and Oceania via sea corridors.

The rapidly transient politico-strategic developments across the Indo-Pacific are witnessing its regional architecture getting challenged by virtue of capacity constraints, alternative forms of regionalism and security, new versions of “aid” paradigms and the far-reaching implications of them all. By and large, it will be these determinants that are likely to place the Indo-Pacific region at a crossroads. A pertinent question thus arising is: Is the contemporary aid paradigm being put in place [by China] seemingly driven by the donor’s national interests? This is being reinterpreted often as “influence aid” that is fast taking over the Pacific Islands. Going by statistics, the answer is tilting rapidly towards an affirmative yes—thus calling out regional players/stakeholders to balance out the phenomenon. Rise of the Chinese influence and involvement in the Pacific Islands became noteworthy during the decade of the 2000s, following the previous phase [1980s and 1990s], when Japan was, in fact, the second-highest donor for the region.

A decade later, the field was teeming with China, Russia, and the Middle Eastern countries—thereby witnessing a relative decline in Japanese aid. The top most priority for the Pacific Islands remains the dual demand for infrastructure and poverty alleviation. Nations including Japan and India need to focus on specialized projects while responding to the needs of the Pacific Islands.

* Dr. Monika Chansoria is a Senior Fellow (non-resident) at The Japan Institute of International Affairs, Tokyo.

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Developmental Challenges of Smaller Island Nations: Case of the Pacific

Despite their limited national landmass, the Pacific Island nations have huge exclusive economic zones (EEZ) and remain an important route for transporting products and natural resources. Japan's imports from Australia¹ and its exports to Australia and New Zealand pass through this sea area—thereby underlining the vitality of maintaining stability in the region.

Socio-economic developmental problems are extensive when an island associated with its smallness and isolation is located at international borders. By far, Australia remains the largest donor to the Pacific Islands, with Japan falling in the third place, just behind New Zealand. Tokyo is not alone in seeking to shore up its influence in the Pacific Island region, with both Australia and New Zealand too having announced increased aid to the Pacific Islands in their most recent fiscal budgets. However, noteworthy, is China becoming an increasingly important source of financial aid and assistance to these island nations in recent years. The growing engagement of Beijing in the region raises concerns. This is primarily due to the nature of financial assistance provided, much of which comes in the form of concessional loans, rather than aid grants favored by Japan, Australia and New Zealand.²

Australia's International Development Minister, Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, warned in January 2018 about the ability of some Pacific Islands to repay their debts to China. According to the Lowy Institute in Australia, China has provided around US \$1.8 billion in financial assistance (including concessional loans) to the region. Tonga, Vanuatu, Samoa and Papua New Guinea have all borrowed significant sums from China in recent years, often raising apprehension that Beijing could use the debt owed by the cash-strapped Pacific Islands to its strategic advantage³ at any given point. This is particularly relevant for debt related to important infrastructure such as ports, which could be put to use for military purposes.⁴

It is well documented that small island economies with limited resources and markets do not necessarily mean low per capita income economies.⁵ They, on the contrary, are richer than many big developing economies. For instance, the per capita incomes of Hawaii, Guam, and Okinawa are higher than the average per capita income of the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries.⁶ Guam—one of the region's small islands has been enjoying the highest per capita income in the South Pacific. The Caribbean Islands of Bermuda, Cayman and the British Virgin Islands enjoy the highest per capita income in the world with booming offshore banking businesses. The size of land area and population are not consistently related to the level of per capita income.⁷ A case in point is Papua New Guinea, the largest island

¹ Australia supplies almost half of the iron ore, coal, and raw cotton that Japan imports.

² “Japan deepens its commitment to the Pacific Islands,” *The Economist*, June 11, 2018.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Hiroshi Kakazu, *Island Sustainability: Challenges and Opportunities for Okinawa and Other Pacific Islands in a Globalized World*, (Victoria, Canada: Trafford Publishing, 2007), pp. 15–33.

⁶ Hiroshi Kakazu, “Challenges and Opportunities for Japan's Remote Islands,” *Eurasia Border Review*, vol. 2, no. 1, Summer 2011.

⁷ *Ibid.*

in the South Pacific, although its per capita income is the lowest in the region.⁸

The ongoing trends of Japan, i.e., globalization, decentralization (or greater regional autonomy through localization), rural depopulation, a knowledge-based and environmentally conscious society could be push factors for the future course of island societies if appropriate policy and strategies are adopted and put to practice.⁹ Despite the new opportunities it brings, globalization is feared by many islanders because it exposes local workers and small enterprises to global competition. Globalization and localization should not be traded off against each other, instead should be considered essential and complementary factors for the islands' future growth and development.¹⁰ Without efficient and value-added use of location factors such as labor, niche technologies, culture and natural resources, the local economy is unlikely to withstand the tides of changes brought about by globalization. Undoubtedly the urgency of integrating national as well as island economies into the international economy shall be heightened in the coming decades.¹¹

Japan and Pacific Islands: A Model for Highlighting “Bilateral Benefits and Reciprocity”

When the former South Pacific Forum (SPF) was renamed Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) in November 2000, Japan was among many that attended the Post Forum Dialogues held between the Pacific Island nations and non-member countries, since 1989, even before the renaming—underscoring that regional support for peace and security in the region is flowing by means of existing regional mechanisms such as the Biketawa Declaration. Besides, the chairman of the PIF continues to be invited to Tokyo annually for constructive talks with involvement of the Pacific Islands Centre (PIC) in Tokyo. The PIC is jointly run and hosted by Japan since it was established in October 1996 with the primary objective of the set-up being that of assisting the Forum Islands Countries (FICs) in achieving sustainable economic development through the promotion of trade, investment and tourism. During the recently concluded Second Japan-PIF Policy Dialogue held at Tokyo in March 2019, the need for promoting cooperation between Japan and PIF in the Asia-Pacific was highlighted, especially in the field of maritime security, climate change and fisheries.

It is often perceived that the Pacific Island nations are in a one-way relationship vis-à-vis Japan, where the latter exists to assist the Pacific Islands with their limitations.¹² The contrarian view to the above makes the argument that although the primary objectives of enhancing and stimulating economic growth, sustainable development, and security, for the Pacific Island nations, Japan has also been supporting ongoing efforts towards developing robust monitoring, control and surveillance regimes for sustainable and effective management.¹³

Tokyo appears determined to deepen its commitment to the Pacific Islands by increasing support given their vast development needs as part of its official Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy (FOIP) that seeks to promote the rule of law and freedom of navigation in the region. The aim of the strategy, first mooted by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2016, has been to broaden the scope of Japan's foreign policy with a focus on improving connectivity between Asia and Africa through a free and open Indo-Pacific. Key motivations behind the strategy include raising Japan's profile in the Indo-Pacific region, amid competition and assertiveness

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Kaitu'u 'I Pangai Funaki and Yoichiro Sato, “Wanted: a strategic dialogue with Pacific island countries,” *The Japan Times*, January 28, 2019.

¹³ Ronni Alexander, “Japan and the Pacific Island Countries,” *Revue Juridique Polynésienne*, 2001, pp. 164–175.

especially regarding territorial claims.¹⁴ The FOIP makes a direct reference of the Pacific people as guardians of the ocean through their Pacific Ocean identity¹⁵—the reference was welcomed by the Pacific Island leaders by means of issuing a joint declaration. The name accorded to the 2000 Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting Initiative was “Frontier Diplomacy”—proclaiming thereby that Japan identifies the oceans and space as the last frontier.¹⁶ In this reference, the Pacific, really, is the last frontier for Japan.

Japan is among the traditional four major bilateral donors to the Pacific Island nations, along with Australia, New Zealand and the US. The Pacific Islands’ perception of their relationship with Japan being unidirectional has been long-standing with Japan taking the initiative to develop its relationship with the Pacific Islands as a group through the establishment of the summit-level Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM) in 1997. Ever since, Tokyo has been hosting the PALM summit, every three years. The Fifth PALM summit was crucial in underpinning of economic and marine resource linkages and maintaining close, constructive and mutually beneficial relations with nations lying in the Pacific region.¹⁷ In the context of addressing the unique challenges facing the Pacific Island nations, the Leaders of Japan and the PIF underlined the importance of promoting human security, with a particular focus on capacity-building to ensure greater access to health, education, clean water supplies and bolstering food security.¹⁸

The Pacific Islands Forum calls for development of sustainable economies in the region, by asking for assistance in growth of key economic sectors, transport, telecommunications infrastructure, shipping and aviation. Held exactly a decade ago in 2009, the Fifth PALM summit had stressed upon the importance of infrastructure development, noting that infrastructure was vital in establishing the foundation for productive industries and commercial activities, keeping in mind the particular needs of Smaller Island States.¹⁹ In the sector of infrastructure particularly, development of airports, roads, bridges, harbors and the provision of passenger and cargo vessels, as well as technical cooperation for the operation and maintenance of vessels and port facilities was highlighted.

The Eighth PALM summit, held in Fukushima in May 2018 was co-chaired by Japan’s Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, and the Prime Minister of Samoa, Tuila’epa Sa’ilele Malielegaoi. The summit was attended by representatives from 18 other countries, including Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu, while the French overseas territory of New Caledonia attended for the first time, having become a full member of the Pacific Islands Forum (the main regional body) in 2016.²⁰ During the summit, Japan declared the FOIP strategy as a cornerstone of its foreign relations with the Pacific Islands in reference to the development of human and non-human infrastructure.²¹

¹⁴ *The Economist*, n. 2.

¹⁵ Funaki et al., n. 12.

¹⁶ *Gaiko Forum*, May 2000, no. 141.

¹⁷ “PALM 5: Islanders’ Hokkaido Declaration, 22–23 May 2009,” Press Release, Embassy of Japan in Fiji Islands.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *The Economist*, n. 2.

²¹ The PALM Summit is considered the main venue for Japan to hold dialogue with leaders of the Pacific Islands and its members include Japan, Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Maritime Fulcrum of Japan and the Pacific Islands

Unsurprisingly, maritime security remains the fulcrum of key discussions involving the Pacific Island nations and the Pacific Island leaders expressed their commitment to a “free, open and sustainable maritime order based on the rule of law in the Pacific.”²² PALM also expressed support for Japan’s commitment to economic cooperation and development in the Pacific region by means of the FOIP initiative. The leaders also signaled their intention to “pursue the possibility of greater defense and security exchanges and co-operation.” According to the PALM communiqué, FOIP comprises three strands:

- Promotion and establishment of the rule of law and freedom of navigation;
- Pursuit of economic prosperity through strengthened connectivity; and
- Commitment to peace and stability, with cooperation in the fields of maritime safety and disaster risk reduction.

As part of this strategy, Abe announced a new initiative to strengthen the maritime law-enforcement capacity of the Pacific Islands. The scheme will include personnel training and closer cooperation on vessel surveillance and control, as part of a clampdown on illegal fishing, which deprives Pacific Islands’ governments, the much-needed revenue and threatens sustainability of fish stocks.²³ Besides, 2019 is also the year of Japan hosting, for the first time ever, a three-week-long seminar for capacity-building against ship-to-ship transferring of illicit cargo, and inviting maritime officers from 14 the Pacific Island nations to University of South Pacific in Fiji. In addition, it was agreed to expand the scope of trade between Japan and the Pacific Islands with increased Japanese investments in the region.²⁴ Specifically, Prime Minister Abe held multiple bilateral meetings with individual Pacific Island leaders which saw the announcement for financial assistance for disaster risk reduction projects in Vanuatu, Fiji and Papua New Guinea. More specifically, some significant pronouncements included:

- ¥ 3.5 billion in proposed funding for port development in Samoa;
- ¥ 4.4 billion for improvements to the Honiara Airport in the Solomon Islands; and
- ¥ 2.8 billion grant for Tonga to develop a wireless natural disaster early-warning system.²⁵

India’s Engagement with the Pacific Islands: So Far, Yet, So Near

While the geographies of India and the Pacific Islands might seem very divergent from each other, in reality, India with its 7,500 km long coastline, around 1,000 small islands nurtured by monsoon rains and Himalayan glaciers holds a lot in common with the Pacific Island nations. India is, and has always been, a maritime country.²⁶ It is for this reason that the reach of India’s civilization has extended to much of Southeast Asia—the near neighbourhood for both India, and the Pacific Islands.²⁷

The issues faced by the Pacific Island nations have consistently shaped India’s policy towards

²² *Communiqué*, The Eighth PALM Summit Leaders’ Declaration, Iwaki, Fukushima, 18–19 May 2018, Japan.

²³ *The Economist*, n. 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Keynote Address*, Minister of State for External Affairs, India-Pacific Islands Sustainable Development Conference, Suva, May 25, 2017.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

the region, which has been in the form of aid, grants, soft loans, and capacity-building over the past decades, although at a modest level.²⁸ It has been said that India's relationship with the Pacific Islands has, at times, been adrift. The cooperation should have been much stronger than it was. As the "Indo-Pacific" concept gained in geostrategic importance, and the "Act East" policy of India became more results-oriented and pragmatic, the relationship between India and the Pacific Island nations became sharper and focused.²⁹ Addressing the "adrift" deficit precisely, India has, of late, begun working towards renewing its old relationships and laying foundations for strong partnerships in the future. While addressing the 2018 Shangri La Dialogue, Prime Minister Narendra Modi recalled India's push for its "Act East" policy initiative with a new phase of engagement with the Pacific Island nations. This initiative was one among many other significant measures including a robust set of exchanges and visits across the Indo-Pacific region.³⁰ An unusual element of PM Modi's Indo-Pacific outreach was the November 2014 visit to Fiji in the Pacific Islands where he addressed the Fijian Parliament and led India in the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting. Modi became the first Indian prime minister, and the first world leader to address the Fijian Parliament. Prior to Modi, it was former Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi who visited the Pacific Islands in 1981.³¹

India is working towards becoming a close partner of the Pacific Islands and collaborates closely to advance the developmental agenda of the Pacific Island nations. New Delhi assesses this region to having unlimited potential in an interconnected world.³² The fortune of the two regions is linked to two oceans—the Indian and the Pacific. Oceans are critical to the future and there is a huge potential for cooperation in this area. In the 21st century, oceans have once again reclaimed their role as vital drivers of growth and economies.³³ Besides trade, oceans remain a source of clean energy, food security, climate regulating factors, medicines, etc. At the same time, it is essential to utilize their bounty sustainably—for which ongoing in-depth discussions on *blue economy* shed more light on the solutions and progress achieved in this area.

Gone are the days when nations thought of each other as distant lands separated by oceans and seven time zones. Today, fiber optic cables and satellite links have rendered distance parameters nearly irrelevant.³⁴ For instance, the divergence between India and Fiji begins with the thousands of oceanic miles, and the fact that India is a nation of more than a billion whilst Fiji a nation of a million. These notwithstanding, what unites the two countries are democracy, commitment to liberty, dignity and rights of every individual amid diversity of societies.³⁵ Among the Pacific Islands, Fiji has used its economic resources well and remains a strong voice on behalf of the region. Amid expanding defense and security cooperation, including assistance in defense training and capacity-building owing to shared interests in peace and cooperation in the inter-linked ocean regions, some of the important announcements made by PM Modi at the Fijian Parliament were as follows:³⁶

²⁸ Anil Wadhwa, "India and the South Pacific," Institute of South Asian Studies, *ISAS Insights*, Singapore, no. 562, April 29, 2019.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Prime Minister Narendra Modi's *Keynote Address*, Shangri La Dialogue, June 1, 2018.

³¹ Satu Limaye, "India-South Pacific/Fiji relations," available at <http://cc.pacforum.org/2015/01/acting-east-prime-minister-modi/>

³² India-Pacific Islands Sustainable Development Conference, n. 26.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Address to the Fiji Parliament, *Speeches & Statements*, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, November 19, 2014.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

- A Parliament library
- Grant of US \$ 5 million to strengthen and modernize Fiji's village, small-scale and medium-scale industries
- Provide a Line of Credit of US \$ 70 million for establishment of a co-generation power plant at Rarawai Sugar Mill. This will expand the scope of bilateral cooperation in the sugar sector by enhancing value addition and addressing climate change concerns
- Provide another Line of Credit of US \$ 5 million for upgrading the sugar industry in Fiji³⁷

India's cooperation with the Pacific Islands remains focused on strengthening the small- and medium-scale industries which are the source of enterprise and employment. Agriculture supports a majority of the population in India and the Pacific Islands, and palpably therefore, India has extended its expertise and assistance in increasing productivity in the agriculture sector, amid other trade and investment initiatives in areas such as fisheries, textiles, and precious stones and gems. Besides, India is to set up a centre of excellence in information technology in Fiji in order to equip and integrate Fiji into the global information technology network.

India and the Pacific Islands Leaders' Meeting

Serving as a vital hub for stronger Indian engagement with the Pacific Islands, Fiji rightly proved the platform for the first ever interaction between India and Pacific Islands in 2014. During this meeting, India announced its hope to become a close partner of the Pacific Islands and work towards advancing the region's development priorities. This includes establishing a trade office in India and exploring new ideas for strengthening a mutually beneficial economic chart. India also signed several Memoranda of Understanding with the Pacific Island nations namely Fiji, Cook Islands, Nauru, Samoa and Niue to deepen co-operation in the field of information technology and renewable energies. Some of the vital announcements made by New Delhi include:

- Setting up of a Special Adaptation Fund of US \$ 1 million, by means of which, India would provide technical assistance and training for capacity-building to its Pacific Island partners
- *Pan Pacific Islands Project*
 - Given the distances between islands and poor connectivity, e-networks are an effective means for coordination. In keeping with the success achieved in the pan-Africa Project, India's proposal to develop the Pan Pacific Islands Project will benefit tele-medicine and tele-education
- *Increase in Grant-in-Aid to the Pacific Island nations*
 - Increasing the annual Grant-in-Aid to US \$ 200,000 provided to each Pacific Island country for community projects selected by each recipient nation. This would be rolled over annually³⁸
- *Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC)*
 - Perhaps the most outstanding initiative has been that of establishing the FIPIC that has bridged the geographical distances through shared interests and action
 - The FIPIC-I summit was held in November 2014 in Suva, Fiji, followed by the FIPIC-II summit held in August 2015 in Jaipur, India.

India and Pacific Islands' Sustainable Development

In keeping with the growing ties between the Pacific Island nations and India, a sustainable development conference for the Pacific Islands was organized in May 2017 in Suva, Fiji. Held

³⁷ MOUs signed between India and Fiji during the visit of Prime Minister to Fiji, November 19, 2014.

³⁸ Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks, *Pacific Island Leaders Meeting*, November 19, 2014.

under the aegis of the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation,³⁹ the conference focused on environmental threats and challenges (climate change) facing the small island developing states so as to foster cooperation and collective action. The need to encourage formation of region-wide strategic policies to mitigate and adapt to climate change was highlighted. Interacting with the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF), the Indian expertise was made available through its key partner institutions including, The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI), and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). The focus of the conference was on subjects including *blue economy*, adaptation-mitigation practices for climate change, disaster preparedness, health, the International Solar Alliance as well as finding practical solutions to Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) implementation.⁴⁰

Common Objectives: Climate Change and Renewable Energies

The health of the oceans, in many ways, is synonymous with the health of planet Earth. Oceans offer a fulcrum for the next stage of shared, and thus, sustainable growth.⁴¹ India's commitment to Small Islands Developing States is instrumental for a sustainable future. Facing the searing impact of climate change, New Delhi is spending more than six percent of its economy's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in adapting to environmental consequences. India has chalked out a comprehensive national plan and strategy to mitigate and adapt to climate change. In the said reference, an essential area to be concentrated upon is renewable energies, especially solar and wind energy. Work on a solar energy project with the Pacific Islands at the community level has been initiated by India for which the regional hubs will be developed in the Pacific Islands. A Memorandum of Understanding between Ministry of New and Renewable Energy of the Government of the Republic of India and Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport of the Government of the Republic of Fiji on Co-operation in the field of Renewable Energy has been signed as part of the concrete actions undertaken to create a sustainable world.

Moreover, India has also embarked upon a partnership project with partners from the Pacific Islands—including Kiribati, Nauru, Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Tonga, Solomon Islands and Cook Island—in association with the UN Office for South-South Cooperation. This is the first time that India has entered into a triangular cooperation partnership with the UN with fellow developing countries—in tune with its commitment to South-South Cooperation and the spirit of global partnership embodied in the SDG17 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.⁴² This project aims at strengthening capacities in terms of sharing data that could be used for monitoring climate change, early warning systems, disaster risk reduction management, and resource management for the Pacific Island nations.

India's Mars Mission: The Fiji Connect

Harnessing the potential of Space technology for governance, economic development, conservation, climate change and natural disasters is a global common. The Pacific Islands hold a special place in India's journey to Mars, following the decision by Fiji to host Indian space program scientists in Fiji for tracking India's Mars Mission, named *Mangalyaan* following its

³⁹ Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation was created in 2014 during the visit of PM Narendra Modi to the Pacific Islands in order to deepen cooperation between India and the 14 the Pacific Island nations.

⁴⁰ India-Pacific Islands Sustainable Development Conference, n. 26.

⁴¹ Speech by Minister of State for External Affairs at the launch of India-UN Development Partnership Fund for Pacific Islands, New York, June 08, 2017.

⁴² Ibid.

launch. It is globally acknowledged that India made history by becoming the only country in the world to succeed reaching Mars in the first attempt. In the digital age, every nation can be part of the global information technology industry. Closer engagement in areas like Space technology applications will remain a critical avenue. Keeping in line with this vision, the Indian Space Research Organization announced its plan to open a new space research and satellite monitoring station on the Fiji Islands. Presently, India relies on the US and Australia for assistance in monitoring its satellites over the Pacific.⁴³ Establishing a monitoring station in Fiji would be a major breakthrough for India's space program, providing it with an independent satellite-tracking capacity.⁴⁴

Conclusion

“Broad-based diplomacy in Asia” is often discussed and debated within Tokyo's policymaking circles wherein it's argued that the major challenge for Japan-India relations going forward will be to find avenues through which the two countries can elevate their ties to newer levels. India and Japan should reassert their involvement and influence in the Pacific Islands region through combined efforts that are likely to provide alternative options for funding to critical infrastructure projects in the Pacific Islands. The presence of Japan and India is likely to maintain pressure on other players to conform to international best practices regarding foreign aid and investment.⁴⁵ Aimed largely to propel growth and investment, infrastructure projects such as building institutional, industrial, and transport corridors shall be a boon for better integration of the Pacific Islands' economies in the long term. Japan's expertise in providing quality infrastructure and state-of-the-art technology should be a clincher in this case, coupled with India's emphasis on infrastructure to further propel India's economy—especially by attracting investment in industry and manufacturing to support the “Make in India” campaign and infrastructure.

The Modi-Abe leadership combine exhibits showmanship, content, and cognitive consistency by means of converging themes of nationalism, coupled with motivated eagerness to initiate action driven towards ushering in an era of policy-oriented change, both domestically, and regionally. Signing the Japan-India Vision Statement in Tokyo on 29 October 2018, the Prime Ministers of Japan and India reviewed cooperation on development of connectivity via quality infrastructure and capacity-building carried out bilaterally, as well as, with other partners. More so, the need to do this in an open, transparent and non-exclusive manner based on international standards, responsible debt financing practices, and in alignment with local economic and development strategies and priorities was highlighted.⁴⁶ Modi and Abe's call for greater cooperation to promote entrepreneurship and collaborative infrastructure development in third-party countries namely Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Bangladesh, and others in Southeast Asia and Africa are fine examples of their decisional latitude.⁴⁷ Pacific Islands provide them another avenue for exercising equitable and reciprocal collaborative mechanisms.

An increasingly globalized and networked cyber world calls for more and more reliance on international joint ventures, strategic relationships, and information-sharing partnerships.

⁴³ “India to Set Up Space Research and Satellite Monitoring Station in Fiji,” *Space Daily*, August 21, 2015.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *The Economist*, n. 2.

⁴⁶ Monika Chansoria, “Development of Sri Lanka's East Container Terminal Port: Japan & India's Regional Cooperation in South Asia Shaping Up,” *Policy Brief*, The Japan Institute of International Affairs, June 28, 2019; also see, *Japan-India Vision Statement*, Tokyo, October 29, 2018.

⁴⁷ For more details see, Monika Chansoria, “India-Japan Relations under Modi and Abe: Prospects and Challenges for a Novel Bilateral Asian Dynamic,” *India Foundation Journal*, vol. VII, no. 3, May-June 2019.

Investments in hard and tangible infrastructures such as roads, bridges, ports, monumental buildings, etc., to investments in soft infrastructures such as human resource development and information networking, are crucial as well as urgent in achieving the true ends of development.⁴⁸ Instead of a propensity for informing the Pacific Island nations of policies impacting or involving them, there is a need for tangible attempts to co-create such policies. It has been observed that many the Pacific Island nations have reached a point of endangering their strategic autonomy owing to heavy debts incurred from China.

In Africa, the Indo-Japanese proposed Asia-Africa Growth Corridor holds promise for collaborative progress and benefits. In South Asia, the May 2019 decision to jointly develop Sri Lanka's East Container Terminal of the Colombo Port is a vital step in the said direction.⁴⁹ The potential for New Delhi and Tokyo to establish a stronger collective footprint in South Asia and Africa remains huge. Asia's present geopolitical and geostrategic setting makes it nearly obligatory for two of its most prominent and responsible powers, India and Japan, to step forward and stabilize the balance of power and provide a platform for collaborative and sustainable development for the Pacific Islands. The Pacific Islands being an important partner in the regional maritime paradigm provide India and Japan with a "Third Regional Avenue" following South Asia and Africa, in providing cooperative security and collaborating towards its sustainable growth and development. The fields of joint exploration and research for access to deep-sea minerals and renewable energy initiatives should be of congruent interests to both Japan and India.⁵⁰ This consequently falls in line with the vision to create a free and open Indo-Pacific region linking the African continent with India and countries in South, Southeast Asia, and Oceania via sea corridors.

⁴⁸ *The Economist*, n. 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ In February 2000, an agreement for deep ocean mineral exploration in the EEZs around the Cook Islands, Fiji and Marshall Islands was signed between the mentioned countries, the South Pacific Applied Geo-science Commission, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, and the Mental Mining Agency of Japan; also see, "PALM 2000: Japan-South Pacific Summit," *Pacific News Bulletin*, vol. 15, no. 5, May 2000, pp. 10-11.