

India's Engagement with the Pacific Islands

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India has recently stepped up its engagement with the Pacific Island Developing Countries (PIDC).¹ This may be seen as an extension of its “Look East - Act East” policy, and enhancement of its role in the Pacific region. While relations with Fiji have developed well keeping in view special historical factors, India’s relations with the other Pacific Island countries offer much scope for further expansion. Development assistance trends to the region are briefly surveyed in this article, including that from China. The recently launched Forum for India Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) process and India’s economic engagement with the Pacific islands is also examined.

Background

The Pacific region has been an important geostrategic area, with powers, such as the US, China, Russia, Japan, Australia, France and UK competing with other littoral states for influence and access to land and sea based resources. Important sea lanes of communication traverse the Pacific Ocean, the world’s largest ocean, linking Asia with the Americas. The Pacific Ocean accounts for 31 per cent of the earth’s surface area, 45 per cent of the earth’s ocean space, and a substantial part of the world’s fishery resources. It has boundaries with 43 countries, (including the 16 Pacific Island states), and with ten dependent territories; and it contains 20000 to 30000 islands.² Since the 16th century, European powers such as Spain, Portugal, Britain and France expanded their influence in this region, joined by Russia, Japan and the US in the 18th century. During World War II, the Pacific region witnessed fierce battles between Japanese and Allied forces led by the US. The US and USSR/Russia and now China have deployed nuclear submarines in the Pacific to provide strategic deterrence. India is a relatively new entrant in this zone of strategic rivalry.

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The Pacific Islands-Socio-cultural Aspects

The Pacific Ocean contains a large number of islands. These can be grouped into Micronesia (Northern Pacific), Melanesia (Western Pacific), and Polynesia (Eastern and Central Pacific). The islands generally are larger in size as one goes westward. Culturally, the peoples of the region are very diverse. About 2.3 million people are Austronesian, speaking Oceanian languages, and live mostly in Polynesia, Micronesia, and the smaller islands of Melanesia. About 7 million people are Papuan, speaking Papuan languages, and live mostly in Papua New Guinea and adjacent islands. Arriving first in the region, the Melanesian ancestors settled in the high islands of the Western Pacific. With abundant resources and a complex topography, Melanesian communities developed largely isolated from one another, leading to a multiplicity of languages and cultural traits. In contrast, the resource-poor islands of Polynesia and Micronesia provided the motive for sea travels and expansion into the outer edges of the Pacific Ocean.

For the Pacific Islanders, the ocean is a shared resource as well as a barrier of isolation. The deep oceans represent the frontier, a region of underexploited resources of high economic and strategic value. Yet for most Pacific Islanders, the coastal areas surrounding their islands provide the food, income, culture, and recreation that are so important.

Exclusive Economic Zone Areas and Issues

While many of the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) countries have small land areas, some have large EEZs. The table below indicates the land areas, populations, EEZ areas, continental shelf areas, and total areas.³

Table 1. Land, EEZ and Shelf areas, population, total area

Country	Land Area km ²	Population 2014 ⁴	EEZ Area km ²	Shelf Area ⁵ km ²	Total Area
Australia	7,692,024	23,908,000	6,369,268	2,184,444	8,553,712
New Zealand	268,021	4,596,700	3,479,752	272,271	3,752,023
Fiji	18,270	847,600	1,281,703	43,264	1,324,967
Papua New Guinea	462,840	7,587,200	2,396,575	186,819	2,583,394
Solomon Islands	28,450	611,500	1,596,464	33,196	1,629,660
Vanuatu	12,200	271,100	827,626	8,681	836,307
Micronesia	702	102,800	2,992,415	26,076	3,018,491

Kiribati ⁶	811	111,200	3,437,132	7,078	3,444,210
Marshall Islands	181	53,800	1,992,022	2,891	1,994,913
Nauru	21	10,600	308,506	13	308,519
Palau	458	17,700	604,283	3,467	607,750
Cook Islands	240	15,000	1,960,027	1,213	1,961,240
Niue	260	1,600	316,584	284	316,868
Samoa	2944	190,700	131,535	2,334	133,869
Tonga	748	104,200	664,751	8,588	673,339
Tuvalu	26	11,000	751,672	4,449	756,121

Thus, the small island of Kiribati has a large EEZ, making the total area quite large. This is significant as the EEZ may contain significant natural resources, including living resources. However, the ability of small island states to police and protect their EEZ remains a formidable challenge. Also, the existence of overlapping EEZs between two or more states requires settlement of maritime boundaries⁷, requiring considerable legal and technical expertise. There are some 48 such overlapping maritime boundaries that need settlement, of which 34 have so far been resolved.

Indian interaction with the Pacific Islands has been the strongest with Fiji, where during the British colonial period, Indian labour was brought in to work in the sugar cane fields. Fiji has, therefore, been at the centre of India's engagement with this region.

India's Special Historical Links with Fiji

Indian indentured labour, known as *giritiyas* or *girit*, were brought to Fiji by its British colonial rulers between 1879 and 1916 to work on Fiji's sugar cane plantations⁸. Gujarati and Punjabi immigrants arrived later as free settlers. They adapted to the new environment with changes in their dress, language and culinary habits, although they have maintained their distinct culture and physical appearance. Over 61,000 workers arrived from South and East Asia in Fiji. The majority were from the districts of eastern and southern India, followed by labourers from northern and western India, then later south eastern countries. They originated from different regions, villages, backgrounds and castes that later mingled or intermarried, hence the "Fijian Indian" identity was created. The indentured workers originated mostly from rural village backgrounds or were dispossessed peasants.

The contracts of the indentured labourers, which they called *girit* (agreements), required them to work in Fiji for a period of five years. Public

outrage in the United Kingdom over poor living conditions halted the scheme in 1916. All existing indenture was cancelled in 1920. After a further five years of work as an indentured labourer or as a free labourer, they were given the choice of returning to India at their own expense, or remaining in Fiji. The majority opted to stay because they could not afford to return. After the expiry of their girmits, many leased small plots of land from Fijians and developed their own sugarcane fields or cattle farms. Others went into business in the towns that were beginning to spring up.

The indenture system obliged people of different castes to live, work and eat together and resulted in an end to the caste system. The shortage of females resulted in many marrying outside their caste. A new koiné language, known as Fiji Hindi developed from different languages and dialects of India. The speakers of these languages originated from different regions in India. The language was further heavily enriched by the inclusion of many Fijian and English words and is now the mother tongue of almost all Fiji Indians.

Since the early 1900s, Indians started arriving in Fiji as free agents. Many of them paid their own way and had previously served in Fiji or other British colonies, or had been born in Fiji. The government and other employers brought clerks, policemen, artisans, gardeners, experienced agricultural workers, a doctor and a school teacher. Punjabi farmers and Gujarati craftsmen also paid their own way to Fiji and in later years formed an influential minority amongst the Fiji Indians.

Indians are defined by the constitution of Fiji as anybody who can trace, through either the male or the female lineage, their ancestry back to anywhere on the Indian subcontinent, and all government documents use this name. However, a number of names have been proposed to distinguish Fiji-born citizens of Indian origin both from the indigenous inhabitants of Fiji and from India-born immigrants. Among the more popular proposals are Fiji Indian, Indian Fijian, and Indo-Fijian. All three labels have proved culturally and politically controversial, and finding a label of identification for the Indian community in Fiji has fuelled a debate that has continued for many decades. Other proposed names have been Fijian Indian and Fiji Born Indian.

India's Engagement with the Pacific Islands

India's interactions with the Pacific Islands began when Indian workers were brought to Fiji to work on sugarcane plantations. New Delhi showed a desire to forge closer ties with the Pacific Islands soon after independence in 1947. In 1948, India established a 'Commission for the Government of India' in Fiji, a colony of the United Kingdom at the time. With Fiji's independence in

1970, India set up a High Commission, and through it, established diplomatic links with other Pacific Island nations over the years.⁹

India's development partnership started in 1973, when India donated clothes and medicines to Tonga. India's links with the Pacific Islands have continued to grow over the years. India provided a US\$ 50.4 million Line of Credit to Fiji in 2006, to assist with modernising the nation's sugar industry.

Fiji is a special case. Today, nearly 40 per cent of Fijians are of Indian origin. In the aftermath of the 1987 coup in Fiji, which sought to restrict Indo-Fijians from gaining increased political representation in the Fijian parliament, India imposed trade sanctions and closed its High Commission in Suva. India recognised the government of Frank Bainimarama that came to power soon after the 2006 coup, because his government sought better relations with the Indo-Fijian community. India's foreign policy priorities in Fiji include a desire to ensure fair treatment to people of Indian descent.

India's engagement with the other Pacific Island Countries has also become more pronounced over the past decade. In 2006 India announced an annual grant of US\$ 100,000 to each of the 14 island nations. This was subsequently increased to US\$ 125,000 in 2009. Between 2005 and 2012, Indian development assistance to this region totalled over US\$ 50 million in the form of Lines of Credit and over US\$ 11 million in grants.

Regional Frameworks in the Pacific Region

The Pacific region includes several regional entities and frameworks, which have overlapping memberships and are promoted by different countries. These have an impact on India's engagement with the Pacific Islands and are therefore briefly outlined below.

Pacific Islands Forum (PIF): There are 16 island countries that form the Pacific Islands Forum, a body set up in 1999 as successor to the earlier South Pacific Forum that was set up in 1971. The PIF with 16 member states includes the North and South Pacific islands, as well as the large developed island countries of Australia and New Zealand. The 14 other Island states are Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. Two other territories are associate members - New Caledonia, and French Polynesia. There are ten entities with observer status, and 17 countries, which are dialogue partners. The latter group includes the USA, France, UK, Spain, Italy, Turkey, China, Japan, India, South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia,

Philippines, Canada, Cuba, and the EU. Of the PIF countries, Cook Islands and Niue have a free association agreement with New Zealand, the latter not yet a member of the UN. The PIF includes Australia and New Zealand, which while being parts of the region, are developed countries and have their respective geostrategic interests. Their priorities are not necessarily the same as the concerns of the other 14 PIF states.

The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), formerly known as the South Pacific Commission, was set up in Australia in 1947, and now has 22 Pacific Island Countries and dependent territories plus Australia, New Zealand, US, and France. It is actively involved in development work, and is governed by a Biennial Conference of the Pacific Community, the next one will be held in Niue on 4-5 November 2015.

The Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF)¹⁰ was launched in 2012 and held its most recent Third Leaders Summit meeting in Fiji on 2-4 September 2015. It is a South-South platform and includes representatives from government, civil society, and business. The PIDF is open to all Pacific Island Countries irrespective of their political status, whether independent states or dependant territories. All public sector, private sector and civil society organisations from the following Pacific Countries are eligible to participate in PIDF activities: American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Island, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Palau, Pitcairn Islands, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Island, Timor Leste, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Wallis and Futuna. The Third Summit appointed the first Secretary General of PIDF. According to some observers, the PIDF, which does not include Australia and New Zealand, is intended to balance the dominant role of these two countries in the PIF. Fiji's response to its suspension from the PIF may also have contributed to this development.¹¹ It is reportedly receiving financial support from the UAE, Qatar, China, Russia, and Turkey, and is sometimes seen as a competitor to the PIF.

The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC) set up in 1989 comprises 21 Pacific rim countries and territories, including the PIF members Australia, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea. India has been an observer in the APEC since 2011. Its full membership is pending though supported by the US, Japan and Australia. The next APEC session is in Manila, 18-19 November 2015. India's membership of APEC could enhance its role in the Pacific region.

The ten member Association for South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) set

up in 1967 has no PIF members. The East Asia Summit (EAS) has been held since 2005, and now includes 18 members, including the ASEAN plus three (including Japan, China, South Korea); Australia, New Zealand, India; and recently the US and Russia. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) comprises 27 countries, including the PIF members Australia, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea.

It can be seen that the Pacific region includes a number of regional entities, with overlapping memberships, and some duplication in activities. The regional framework for the Asia Pacific is complicated by different countries advocating various entities, and differing agendas. In this situation, the smaller PIF countries have a limited role to play. The future evolution of the multilateral frameworks in the Asia Pacific will have an impact on the PIF countries.

Major Development Partners of the Pacific Island Countries

The major development partners for the PIF states have been Australia, New Zealand, USA, Japan, the EU, France, and multilateral agencies such as the Asian Development bank, and the World Bank-IDA group.

The flow of official development assistance from the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) member countries to the PIF countries is given below.¹²

Table 2
ODA flows from DAC member states to the PIF countries, US\$ 2013 mn

Country	ODA disbursed	Main sources
Cook Islands	19	New Zealand, Australia
Fiji	79	Australia, EU, Japan
Kiribati	62	Australia, Japan, IDA
Marshall Islands	93	USA, Japan, AsDB
Micronesia	142	USA, Japan., Australia
Nauru	28	Australia, New Zealand, EU
Niue	19	New Zealand, Australia, EU
Palau	34	Japan, USA, Australia
Papua New Guinea	641	Australia, AsDB, Global Fund
Samoa	103	Australia, New Zealand, IDA
Solomon Islands	259	Australia, New Zealand, Japan
Tonga	77	Australia, IDA, AsDB
Tuvalu	25	Australia, Japan, New Zealand
Vanuatu	89	Australia, New Zealand, Japan

While data on ODA from the OECD countries is available in a standardised form, the data on ODA flows from non-OECD countries is dispersed and not readily available. Cumulative Aid flows to the PIF countries during 2006–13 were from Australia (\$6.8 bn), EU (\$ 0.77 bn), France (\$0.89 bn), Japan (\$1.23 bn), New Zealand (\$1.10 bn), and USA (\$1.77 bn). The leading recipients were Papua New Guinea (\$440 mn), Fiji (\$339 mn), Tonga (\$139 mn), Samoa (\$208 mn), Vanuatu (\$224 mn), Cook islands (\$49 mn), and Micronesia (\$28 mn).¹³

Australia continues to be by far the biggest source of ODA for the PIF countries. This reflects the dominant role that Australia plays in the region. China and India are two non-OECD countries that have stepped up their engagement with the region.

China and the PIF Islands

China has emerged as a substantial source of aid for these countries outside the OECD. During 2006–13, Chinese aid flows were estimated at \$1.5 bn and have shown an increasing trend. The People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China (Taiwan) have engaged in diplomatic competition.¹⁴ The “One China Policy” dictates that no state can diplomatically recognise the sovereignty of both, the PRC and the ROC. As of 2014, six states (Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu) maintain relations with Taiwan while eight recognise the PRC.

In addition, several Pacific countries, including Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Fiji, Vanuatu, and Samoa have ethnic minorities of Chinese descent among their citizens. There are an estimated 80,000 “overseas Chinese” in the Pacific Islands, including 20,000 in Fiji and 20,000 in Papua New Guinea. Countries including Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu have also attracted Chinese businesses and investments.

China has strengthened its engagement with the region through the mechanism of the China Pacific Islands Countries Economic Development and Cooperation Forum, which has so far held two meetings – the first in 2006 in Fiji, and the second in 2013 in Guangzhou. Its main commitments were concessional loan packages, debt relief for Least Developed Countries, commercial loan facilities, duty free imports from least developed countries, provision of scholarships and training for government officials, and provision of medical assistance to the region through a PLA Navy hospital ship.

India's Economic Linkages with the Pacific Islands

The small size and markets of many PIF states, together with their remoteness from India pose obstacles to merchandise trade. Trade figures for 2014 –15 in US \$ million are given below:^{15,16}

Table 3

India's trade with PIF region, 2014, and total trade by PIF countries

Country	Indian Exports	Indian Imports	Total imports 2014	Total exports 2014
Cook Islands	0.30	0.00	120	21
Fiji	49.75	1.80	3030	1373
Kiribati	1.00	0.01	95	5
Nauru	0.02	10.19	95	32
Papua New Guinea	52.19	157.29	4000	5670
Solomon Islands	5.22	13.47	509	450
Tonga	0.92	0.01	200	20
Tuvalu	0.03	1.42	12	0.00
Vanuatu	1.86	0.01	311	63
Palau	0.07	0.01	180	6
Niue	0.00	0.03	11	0.00
Micronesia	0.23	0.00	220	31
Marshall Islands	0.12	0.01	180	65
Samoa	2.48	1.18	332	72
Guam*	0.41	0.00	1250	41
French Polynesia*	3.07	0.03	1762	170

(*- non-PIF territories with substantial trade)

The trade volumes are quite small, except for Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Nauru, Solomon Islands, and Samoa. The figures do not include indirect trade via third countries, and are based on exports from India (FOB) and Imports into India (CIF); even small individual shipments can cause large changes in trade volumes. However in some large markets such as Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Guam, and French Polynesia, there seems to be scope for increasing exports from India.

The main imports from Papua New Guinea are wood and wooden articles, and from Nauru, it is minerals, mainly phosphate. Papua New Guinea is richly endowed with natural resources, including mineral and renewable resources, such as forests, marine (including a large portion of the world's major tuna stocks), and in some parts, agriculture. Mineral deposits, including gold, oil, and copper account for 72 per cent of export earnings. Oil palm

production has grown and palm oil is an important agricultural export. Other exports include coffee, cocoa, coconut oil/copra, tea, and rubber. Oil has been found in the Southern Highlands Province, and natural gas resources of estimated 23 trillion cubic feet are being exploited through a major LNG - PNG project with customers in China, Taiwan and Japan. A number of international companies are actively pursuing hydrocarbon exploration. Papua New Guinea, therefore, offers good prospects for Indian business development.

While merchandise trade faces obstacles in the form of small volumes and logistics, trade in services, especially IT services can be rendered from a distance and therefore this segment offers market opportunities, provided there is adequate connectivity. Tourism services depend on air connections and transport costs, but the e-Tourist visa system now in place should lead to increased tourism from the PIF region in future. The education and health sectors also offer good potential for service trade.

On the investment front, the larger economies, especially those, which have the capacity to export offer some prospects for investment. In some cases, incentives provided for financial service enterprises and favourable tax regimes may also attract investment.

The setting up of a Trade Office for PIF countries, and the provision of free exhibition space by ITPO in trade fairs should provide opportunities for business in the PIF countries in the Indian market. The Indian support for small and micro industries, agro industries, and renewable energy projects should also lead to more exports of plant and machinery from India. The launching of a Business Accelerator for the FIPIC by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI)¹⁷ will facilitate exchange of trade and business related information, and provide matchmaking opportunities for B2B linkages between India and the PIF countries.

Recent Indian Initiatives – the FIPIC Process

On 19 November 2014, Prime Minister Modi of India visited Fiji soon after the restoration of democracy there. During the visit he also met with the leaders of 14 Pacific Island countries. This meeting launched the Forum for India Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC), which would meet regularly and provide an impetus to India's cooperation with these islands. A number of initiatives were announced by India. These include:¹⁸ Setting up of a Special

Adaptation Fund of \$1 million; Development of Pan Pacific Islands Project for telemedicine and tele-education; Indian e-Tourist Visa facility for Pacific Island countries; Increase in Grant-in-Aid to Pacific Island countries from \$125,000 to \$200,000 annually; Establishment of Trade Office for PIF countries in India; and several other initiatives. The second Summit Meeting of India and Pacific Island Leaders in India was planned in 2015. Cooperation in the use of space technology applications, climate change, disaster risk reduction, management and resource management, and healthcare was envisaged.

Apart from the above, several India-Fiji bilateral initiatives were announced – a Line of Credit of \$70 mn for a Co-Generation Plant, cooperation between the Foreign Service Institute, India and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Fiji; provision of US\$5 million fund for promoting small business and village enterprise in Fiji, increase ITEC slots to Fiji to 125 per year, enhancement of cooperation in rice, coconut and dairy industry in Fiji, support to IT and “Digital Fiji” ; collaboration in space technology, and encouragement to the Indian film industry to shoot in Fiji.

These commitments marked a major leap forward in India's engagement with the Pacific Islands, with the institutional framework of regular FIPIC summit meetings to maintain the momentum.

The second FIPIC Summit was held in Jaipur, 19–21 August 2015. 13 out of 14 Pacific Island countries were represented, including eight Heads of State/Government or equivalent (Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Fiji, Niue, Samoa, Tuvalu, Marshall Islands, Nauru), by Vice president/Deputy Prime Minister (Solomon Islands, Micronesia) and Ministers/Special Envoys (Cook Islands, Kiribati, Tonga). The delegates met with the President of India, and participated in a business meeting.

A number of concrete initiatives were announced¹⁹ by Prime Minister Modi: (1) Establishment of an Institute for Sustainable Coastal and Ocean Research in the region and a network of marine biology research stations in various island nations; (2) Holding an International Conference on “Ocean economy and Pacific Island Countries” in New Delhi in 2016; (3) Direct support and capacity building to island states in Indian Ocean, from the Indian navy especially for coastal surveillance and hydrographic surveys for a better understanding of their maritime zones and strengthening security of their EEZs; (4) Goodwill visits by the Indian navy to Pacific Islands including providing support in areas like healthcare through medical camps on the islands; (5) Establishment of a “Space Technology Applications Centre” in any one of the Pacific Island countries for the entire region and enhanced

Indian support for training in space applications through customised courses; (6) Support from Pacific Islands for Telemetry, Tracking and Command for Indian space missions; (7) Creation of capacity to deal with natural disasters; (8) Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation training programme to be expanded substantially; (9) Offer of more scholarships for higher education in India; (10) Expansion of India's training courses for diplomats as well as in business management; (11) Training of 70 women solar engineers; and to provide solar electrification to 2,800 houses; (12) Establishment of information technology laboratories; (13) Support for the development of micro, small and medium enterprises, and for purchase of machinery for coconut processing and enhancing rice and sugarcane yields, (14) Setting up of a pharmaceutical manufacturing plant and distribution centre in the region with a Line of Credit for this project; (15) Provision of gratis visas to the nationals of Pacific Island countries; (16) Prasar Bharti, India's national broadcaster will gift television and radio programmes on culture, entertainment, news, education, etc., in English and Hindi and will organise a specialised training programme for broadcasters from the Pacific Island countries; (17) Support for the creation of India Centres through e-libraries and supply of books to libraries at universities in PIDC countries.

These are a formidable array of initiatives announced at the FIPIC-2, which will further widen and deepen the scope of India's cooperation with the PIDC countries. The activities envisaged should lead to fruitful multi-sectoral, and multifaceted cooperation and direct benefits to the people of the PIF countries.

The PIDC countries offer some opportunities for development of aquaculture, coconut and coir based industries in which India has considerable expertise. The dispersed nature of the Islands makes them particularly suitable for exploitation of renewable energy such as wind, biomass, and solar energy. Another sector of importance is telecommunications and broadcasting, particularly through satellite based platforms, which can link together the islands. The exploration of the EEZ may yield some useful resources, though many of the islands are keen to protect the marine environment, especially the coral reefs. Other area of cooperation could be the health sector, through supply of pharmaceuticals and tertiary health services, IT services, and human resources and training for professional cadres. Another important area of cooperation could be capacity building for disaster management, especially for typhoons.

The PIDC countries have a great stake in preventing global warming as they are directly threatened by rise in sea levels and extreme climate events such as typhoons. However, they need to be sensitised to the need to maintain the principle of common and differentiated responsibility, which some developed countries are seeking to undermine. India's efforts at mitigating climate change despite its low per capita carbon emissions and need for development, needs to be forcefully projected. India's experience in maintaining a robust multicultural, multiparty democracy would be relevant. The PIDC countries' support for India's permanent membership of the UN Security Council should be pursued and strengthened.

However, the ambitious nature of the programmes announced raises some issues related to timely implementation because the existing Indian diplomatic presence in the PIDC countries seems far too weak to support the programme. India has resident missions in only two of the PIDC countries – Fiji and Papua New Guinea. The remaining PIDC countries are covered by non-resident missions located in Fiji (Nauru, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu), Japan (Marshall Islands), Philippines (Palau, Micronesia), and Papua New Guinea (Solomon Islands). In comparison the number of resident missions of other countries in the PIDC is: Australia (8), China (6), and Japan (12).

The missions in Papua New Guinea and Fiji are relatively small and understaffed to handle an ambitious programme. Moreover, distances between the PIF countries are large and direct flights are often not available. These problems complicate programme implementation from non-resident missions. A related problem is the insufficient capacity within the Ministry of External Affairs, with the Southern Division handling the ASEAN and the PIF (including Australia and New Zealand) with only nine officers. Clearly, capacity in New Delhi as well as in the Pacific region will need to be augmented in order to ensure timely implementation of India's commitments.

Conclusion

India's cooperation with the PIDC countries is growing steadily in recent years. There is considerable scope for building multi-sectoral, mutually fruitful cooperation in the future. Given the diversity among the islands, cooperation needs to be tailored to the specific conditions in these islands. The recent FIPIC summits have created high expectations and the focus should now be on timely and efficient implementation. Thus, there is a requirement for strengthening India's capacity for interacting effectively with this region.

Notes :

- ¹ In this article, PIDC refers to developing members of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), which includes the developed countries of Australia and New Zealand.
- ² Countries of the Pacific Rim, <http://geography.about.com/library/misc/blpacificrim.htm>.
- ³ Sea around us project , <http://www.searoundus.org/> accessed 24 October 2015.
- ⁴ Population and Development Profiles: Pacific Island Countries, UNFPA, http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/pacific/drive/web__140414_UNFPAPopulationandDevelopmentProfiles-PacificSub-RegionExtendedv1LRv2.pdf, accessed 25 October 2015.
- ⁵ Area of the continental shelf claimed under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.
- ⁶ Kiribati consists of three disconnected island groups- the Gilbert, Phoenix and Line Islands, covering Northern, Southern, Eastern and Western hemispheres
- ⁷ Status of maritime boundaries in Pacific Island countries, http://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/FAME/Meetings/HOF/9/WP11_Maritime_Boundary_Delimitations_E.pdf, accessed 29 September 2015.
- ⁸ India-Fiji relations, Ministry of External Affairs brief, http://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India_Fiji_Bilateral_Brief.pdf , accessed 25 October 2015.
- ⁹ K.K. Prasad, India-Pacific Islands brief, IDCR, CPR, Delhi, April 2014 <http://idcr.cprindia.org/blog/india-pacific-islands-brief>, accessed 29 September 2015.
- ¹⁰ PIDF website <http://pacificidf.org> , accessed 29 September 2015.
- ¹¹ Pacific Partners Outlook: Fiji's New Forum Offers Challenges, Opportunities for Washington and its Partners, CSIS, July 2014, <http://csis.org/publication/pacific-partners-outlook-fijis-new-forum-offers-challenges-opportunities-washington-and->, accessed 29 September 2015.
- ¹² AID statistics, DCD-DAD, OECD <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/data.htm>, accessed 2 October 2015.
- ¹³ Chinese aid in the Pacific, Lowy Institute, <http://www.lowyinstitute.org/chinese-aid-map>, accessed 2 October 2015.
- ¹⁴ The Geopolitics of Chinese aid: Mapping Beijing's Funding in the Pacific; Dr Philippa Brant; <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2015-03-04/geopolitics-chinese-aid>, accessed on 25 October 2015.
- ¹⁵ Export-Import Data Bank, Ministry of Commerce, India.
- ¹⁶ UNCTAD Stat, <http://unctadstat.unctad.org/wds/TableViewer/tableView.aspx> accessed, 2 October 2015.
- ¹⁷ FICCI Business Accelerator for the FIPIC, <http://www.ficci-fipic.in> , accessed 2 October 2015.
- ¹⁸ India-Fiji relations, High Commission of India , Suva, July 2015.

- ¹⁹ Closing remarks by Prime Minister Modi at FIPIC-2, 21 August 2015, <http://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/25747/Closing+Remarks+by+Prime+Minister+at+Summit+of+Forum+for+India+Pacific+Island+Countries+in+Jaipur+August+21+2015>, accessed 2 October 2015.
