Quad Talks in Singapore

Why in news?

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India will hold the official level talks on the ‘Quad’ Asia-Pacific formation on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit in Singapore.

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What are the prospects?

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- The Quadrilateral Group consists of India, Australia, Japan and the U.S.
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- The Quad has a shared objective to ensure and support a “free, open and prosperous” Indo-Pacific region.
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- The present meeting comes a year after it was launched in Manila during the ASEAN.
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- The discussion will provide an opportunity to exchange ideas about the future of the Asia-Pacific region.
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- The meeting is likely to focus on infrastructure projects and on maritime security schemes in the region.
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- Building humanitarian disaster response mechanisms is also expected to be on the agenda.
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- **Japan** - India and Japan have recently announced a series of joint projects.
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- This is in terms of what they have called the “Asia-Africa growth corridor” in the Indo-Pacific region.
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- Among the projects that they will work together on are
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i. the Jamuna Railway bridge in Bangladesh
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ii. other bridges in northeastern States of India
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iii. housing, school and electricity projects in Rohingya areas in Myanmar
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iv. an LNG plant in Sri Lanka
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v. a cancer hospital in Kenya
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- **Australia** - Australia has unveiled an ambitious $2 billion project to fund infrastructure.
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- There are plans to build maritime and military infrastructure in the Pacific region, where it is willing to cooperate with other Quad members.
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- **Others** - The four countries are expected to talk about other regional developments.
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- These include Maldives elections, the collapse of the government in Sri Lanka and the latest developments in North Korea.
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What are the challenges ahead?

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- **Objective** - Despite the potential for cooperation, the Quad remains a mechanism without a defined strategic mission.
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- In 2007, when the grouping was first formed following cooperation after the 2004 tsunami, the idea was to better coordinate maritime capabilities for disaster situations.
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- When revived in 2017, the grouping seemed to have become a counter to China’s growing inroads into the region.
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- So Quad members still face the challenge of defining its common agenda.
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- **Region** - A common definition of the geographical area encompassed is yet to be found.
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- The US sees itself and India as the extremes of the Indo-Pacific.
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- On the other hand, India and Japan have included the oceans up to Africa in their definition.
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- The entire focus on the Indo-Pacific makes the Quad a maritime, rather than land-based, grouping.
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- This raises questions whether the cooperation extends to the Asia-Pacific and Eurasian regions.
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- **Maritime** - Even on maritime exercises, there is a lack of concurrence.
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- E.g. India has not admitted Australia in the Malabar exercises with the U.S. and Japan, despite requests from it.
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- It is felt that it would be too early to discuss “militarising” the Quad.
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- India has also resisted raising the level of talks from an official to the political level.
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- India is the only member not in a treaty alliance with the other Quad countries which could possibly slow down progress.
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- Given all, the outcome of the Singapore meet will be judged by the ability of the group to issue a joint declaration, unlike in the last two meets.
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Source: The Hindu

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