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Spain Joins IPOI — India's Indo-Pacific Maritime Architecture Expands

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WHY IN NEWS

Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares handed over Spain’s signed Declaration of Accession to the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) to External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on January 21, 2026, during a visit to India. Spain becomes the fourth major European country to join India’s Indo-Pacific framework.

WHAT IS THE INDO-PACIFIC OCEANS INITIATIVE (IPOI)?

The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative is a **non-treaty, voluntary, cooperative maritime framework** proposed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the **East Asia Summit in Bangkok on November 4, 2019**. It builds on India’s SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision, first articulated by PM Modi in March 2015 in Mauritius.

Purpose: IPOI is not a military alliance but a framework for cooperation on the maritime commons — ensuring open, free, and rules-based maritime order in the broader Indo-Pacific region, covering both the Indian Ocean and the Pacific.

SEVEN PILLARS OF IPOI

IPOI is organised around **seven thematic pillars**, each co-led or co-sponsored by a member nation:

Pillar	Focus Area
Maritime Security	Combating piracy, illegal fishing, terrorism at sea
Maritime Ecology	Marine biodiversity, coral reef protection, plastic pollution
Maritime Resources	Sustainable use of ocean resources, deep-sea mining governance
Capacity Building & Resource Sharing	Training, joint exercises, technology sharing
Disaster Risk Reduction & Management	Early warning systems, joint disaster response
Science, Technology & Academic Cooperation	Marine research, oceanography, climate science
Trade Connectivity & Maritime Transport	Port connectivity, shipping lanes, maritime logistics

INDIA–SPAIN RELATIONS: NEW MOMENTUM

Trade: India–Spain bilateral trade reached approximately **€9 billion** in recent years. Spain is among India’s top five European trade partners. Key Indian exports to Spain: textiles, pharmaceuticals, machinery; Spain exports: machinery, transportation equipment, chemicals.

Dual Year: The January 2026 India–Spain Dual Year (a cultural and economic engagement programme) was launched alongside the IPOI accession — signalling a broad upgrade in bilateral ties.

Defence potential: Spain is a major NATO member and arms producer (Navantia shipyards). India’s growing defence modernisation provides scope for naval cooperation, especially in submarine technology and ship-building.

THE GROWING EUROPEAN EMBRACE OF IPOI

Spain’s accession makes it the **fourth major European power** to join IPOI after:

United Kingdom — co-leads the Capacity Building & Resource Sharing pillar

France — extensive Indo-Pacific presence via overseas territories (New Caledonia, Réunion, French Polynesia)

Italy — joined as EU-India strategic partnership deepens

Why Europe cares about the Indo-Pacific:

~**90% of global trade** passes through sea lanes that traverse the Indo-Pacific

China’s expanding naval presence, particularly in the South China Sea and Indian Ocean Region (IOR), raises alarm in European capitals

The EU released its own *EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific* (September 2021), aligning with India’s framework

The Russia–Ukraine conflict (2022–) accelerated Europe’s strategic pivot — recognising that security is indivisible across geographies

IPOI VS. QUAD: COMPLEMENTARY, NOT COMPETING

Feature	IPOI	QUAD
Nature	Multilateral, open, non-treaty	Quadrilateral (India, US, Japan, Australia)
Focus	Maritime cooperation, all seven pillars	Security, technology, supply chains, health
Membership	Open to all like-minded nations	Fixed four members
Military dimension	None — purely cooperative	Has military exercise component (Malabar)
Secretariat	None	No formal secretariat

IPOI is **India's open architecture** — any nation accepting the framework's principles can join. QUAD is a **closed strategic grouping**. Both serve India's Indo-Pacific policy but at different levels of commitment.

INDIA'S INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY: KEY PILLARS

India's broader Indo-Pacific engagement rests on several interlocking frameworks:

SAGAR (2015): Security and Growth for All in the Region — PM Modi's Indian Ocean vision

IPOI (2019): Broader Indo-Pacific maritime cooperation

QUAD (revived 2017, elevated 2021): Strategic grouping with US, Japan, Australia

IORA (Indian Ocean Rim Association): Trade and economic cooperation

IONS (Indian Ocean Naval Symposium): Naval cooperation forum

Colombo Security Conclave: India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bangladesh — maritime security

UPSC RELEVANCE

IPOI founding date (November 4, 2019, Bangkok EAS), seven pillars, Spain as 4th European member; SAGAR doctrine (2015, Mauritius); QUAD members; IORA founding

MAINS GS-2:

“India’s Indo-Pacific strategy: Examine how the expansion of IPOI membership reflects India’s growing strategic relevance in the maritime domain.” | “Critically evaluate India–EU maritime cooperation through the lens of IPOI.”

INTERVIEW:

“How does India balance its strategic autonomy with participation in frameworks like IPOI and QUAD that may be perceived as targeting China?”

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGE PEDIA

IPOI — CORE DATA:

Proposed by: PM Narendra Modi

Venue: East Asia Summit, Bangkok

Date: November 4, 2019

Nature: Non-treaty, voluntary maritime framework

Seven pillars: Maritime Security; Maritime Ecology; Maritime Resources; Capacity Building & Resource Sharing; Disaster Risk Reduction & Management; Science, Technology & Academic Cooperation; Trade Connectivity & Maritime Transport

European members: UK, France, Italy, Spain (4th — joined January 2026)

INDIA–SPAIN BILATERAL:

Bilateral trade: ~€9 billion

India–Spain Dual Year: launched January 2026

Spain is a NATO member and major EU economy (4th largest in EU by GDP)

Key Spanish defence company: Navantia (shipbuilder)

INDIA’S INDO-PACIFIC ARCHITECTURE:

SAGAR: Security and Growth for All in the Region — March 2015, Mauritius

QUAD: India, USA, Japan, Australia — revived 2017, leaders-level from 2021

IORA: Indian Ocean Rim Association — 23 member states, 9 dialogue partners; HQ: Ebène, Mauritius

IONS: Indian Ocean Naval Symposium — 35 member navies

Colombo Security Conclave: India, Sri Lanka, Maldives (+ Bangladesh)

EU INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY:

Released: September 2021

Goal: EU cooperation on trade, governance, green/digital transition in Indo-Pacific

Key focus: Rules-based maritime order, countering unilateral destabilisation

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

~90% of global trade moves by sea; Indo-Pacific sea lanes are the arteries of global commerce

South China Sea: China claims ~90% via “nine-dash line” — disputed by Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, Taiwan

UNCLOS (UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982): India ratified; China selectively applies

India’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ): ~2.37 million km² (7th largest in world)

Malabar Exercise: Annual trilateral naval exercise — India, USA, Japan (Australia joined in 2020)

Sources: News on AIR, Insights on India, MEA India

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