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Joe Biden looks forward to engaging with Quad partners in Indo-Pacific

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WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden looks forward to engaging with his counterparts in Australia, India and Japan in the Indo-Pacific region as soon as possible, according to a senior administration official.

Quad comprises Japan, India, Australia and the United States. The four countries had in 2017 given shape to the long-pending proposal of setting up the "Quad" or the Quadrilateral coalition to counter China's aggressive behaviour in the Indo-Pacific region.

“President Biden has had warm and productive early conversations with his counterparts in Australia, India, and Japan, and looks forward to engaging even more directly with our partners in the Indo-Pacific as soon as possible,” a senior administration official told PTI.

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In less than 50 days after being sworn in as the President of the United States, Biden and his administration, including secretary of State Tony Blinken, defence secretary Lloyd Austin and National Security Advisor (NSA) Jake Sullivan have had unprecedented engagement with their counterparts from Quad countries, the official said.
Quad leaders were among the top 10 phone calls of Biden with world leaders. He spoke with Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga on January 27, Prime Minister Scott Morrison of Australia on February 3 and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 8. Indo-Pacific region figured prominently in each of these phone calls.

The informal grouping of Australia, India, Japan and the US is called Quad, a format that is strongly being pushed by the Biden administration.

Quad already has had its first meeting of its foreign minister. The Japanese media had last month reported that a Quad summit is in the works.
Both the White House and the state department have refrained from making any comment on a Quad summit so far. The Pentagon last month said it supports such a meeting of its leaders.

Axios news website, citing people familiar with the matter, reported on Thursday that Biden plans to meet this month with the leaders of Japan, Australia and India in a virtual summit of the so-called Quad.

“By putting a Quad meeting on the president's schedule, the White House is signaling the importance of partnerships and alliances to counter China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region,” it said.

Acting assistant secretary of east Asian and Pacific Affairs Sung Kim, in his address to the 27th US-Japan Security Summit on Wednesday, said that the United States and Japan are also working closely together with India and Australia through the Quad.

“Secretary Blinken and the other Quad foreign ministers met on February 18 and committed to meeting at least annually at the

ministerial level, and on a regular basis at senior and working levels, to strengthen cooperation on advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific region," he said.

During the Quad ministerial on February 18, top diplomats from four countries discussed countering disinformation, counter-terrorism, maritime security, the urgent need to restore the democratically elected government in Burma, and the priority of strengthening democratic resilience in the broader region.

The participants reaffirmed their mutual support for Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) centrality.

"They reiterated their commitment to the Quad meeting at least annually at the Ministerial level and on a regular basis at senior and working levels to strengthen cooperation on advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific region, including support for freedom of navigation and territorial integrity," the state department said in a readout of the meeting.