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TOPIC: BILATERAL TIES

India and Mauritius have decided to elevate ties to enhanced strategic partnership: PM Modi

Strategic Ties Between India and Mauritius

- **Deep Bilateral Relationship:** India and Mauritius share a robust, multifaceted relationship, largely due to the significant Indian-origin population in Mauritius, which comprises nearly 70% of its 1.3 million people. This strong historical and cultural connection forms the foundation of their strategic partnership.
- **Prime Minister Modi's Visit:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Mauritius, almost a decade after his last visit in 2015, underscores India's commitment to deepening the strategic relationship with Mauritius. This visit highlights India's ongoing focus on reinforcing ties in the Western Indian Ocean region amidst growing geopolitical competition.
- **India's SAGAR Framework:** Modi's 2015 visit emphasized the strategic importance of the Western Indian Ocean within India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All) framework. This framework aims to enhance India's maritime influence, ensuring regional security and promoting growth through cooperation with countries in the region.

Mauritius's Colonial Legacy and Sovereignty

- **Colonial History:** Mauritius has a complex colonial past, having been controlled by European powers like the Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British at different times. This history significantly shaped the island's geopolitical position in the Indian Ocean.
- **Independence and Chagos Dispute:** After gaining independence from Britain in 1968, Mauritius sought to reclaim sovereignty over the Chagos archipelago, which Britain had separated and leased to the U.S. for a military base on Diego Garcia. The 2019 International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling and the subsequent UK-Mauritius agreement on Chagos confirmed Mauritius's sovereignty, setting a legal precedent for other post-colonial disputes.
- **Humanitarian and Environmental Cooperation:** The agreement also addresses humanitarian concerns regarding the displacement of Chagos residents and opens avenues for long-term environmental cooperation between Mauritius and the UK.

Geopolitical Implications of the Chagos Agreement

- **Strategic Importance of Diego Garcia:** Mauritius's decision to extend the lease on Diego Garcia for 99 years allows continued U.S. military presence in the region, which is critical for countering China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean.



- **Strengthening U.S. Position:** While some critics in the UK and U.S. fear that the agreement could increase China's presence, the reality is that it bolsters the U.S. strategic positioning in the region, a fact that aligns with India's security interests.
- **India's Behind-the-Scenes Role:** India played a crucial role behind the scenes in promoting this agreement, aligning it with its regional security objectives and helping to counter China's naval ambitions in the Indian Ocean.

India's Infrastructure Development on Agaléga Island

- **Strategic Infrastructure Investment:** India's investment in logistics infrastructure on Agaléga Island highlights Mauritius's strategic significance. Agaléga is an island with a central location in the Indian Ocean, and India's growing maritime interests reflect the need to strengthen its presence in the region.
- **Geopolitical Importance of Mauritius:** Known historically as the "Star and Key of the Indian Ocean," Mauritius's geographic location is crucial for trade and military strategy. While the Suez Canal temporarily reduced its maritime importance, the two World Wars and the Cold War restored its relevance.
- **Relevance in Today's Geopolitics:** Today, as China's global influence grows, the Western Indian Ocean has become a hotspot of intense geopolitical rivalry, with countries like India keen to maintain a foothold in the region.

China's Growing Influence in the Indian Ocean

- **Strategic Ambitions:** China's strategic interest in the Western Indian Ocean is driven by its need for resources from Africa and the Middle East, and its broader ambitions to project naval power across the region.
- **Chinese Infrastructure Projects:** Beijing has invested heavily in infrastructure, including ports and transport corridors, across the Indian Ocean. The establishment of China's first overseas military base in Djibouti is a clear signal of its growing footprint in the region.
- **China's Relationship with Mauritius:** China has also cultivated diplomatic and economic ties with Mauritius, engaging in trade and infrastructure initiatives that further increase the island's geopolitical significance.
- **Mauritius as a Financial Hub:** Mauritius's role as a regional financial center further enhances its importance, serving as a key bridge between Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, which adds to its strategic value.

Broader Geopolitical Interest in the Region

- **Global Power Interest:** Mauritius's strategic location has drawn attention from multiple global powers, including Europe, Gulf countries, and major players like Russia, Iran, and Turkey. These powers are seeking to expand their influence in the Indian Ocean region, which has become a critical area for global economic and military strategy.



- **Mauritius's Strategic Autonomy:** Mauritius has managed to maintain balanced relationships with major global powers, ensuring strategic autonomy in its foreign policy while continuing to be a key player in the region's geopolitics.

India's Strategic Partnership with Mauritius

- **India's Role as a Reliable Partner:** India's success in strengthening ties with Mauritius is built on more than just shared ethnicity—it is due to India's role as a reliable, non-interfering partner. India has supported Mauritius's sovereignty, strategic autonomy, and economic development, reinforcing its influence in the region.
- **Countering China's Influence:** Through its support for Mauritius and alignment of interests in regional security, India aims to counterbalance China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean. Modi's visit underscores India's commitment to deepening the bilateral relationship with Mauritius within the broader framework of regional and global geopolitics.

Conclusion

- **Strengthened Strategic Partnership:** India's deepening strategic partnership with Mauritius reflects their shared historical ties and growing geopolitical significance. Mauritius's role in India's regional security and diplomatic strategy is increasingly important.

Key Focus Areas of India-Mauritius Ties

- **Defence and Maritime Security:**
 - India and Mauritius are working on enhancing defence cooperation, with plans to sign a technical agreement for sharing white-shipping information. This will improve maritime security, protect critical trading routes, and strengthen regional data-sharing on maritime activities.
- **Indian Development Projects:**
 - Over the last decade, India has provided nearly \$1.1 billion in development assistance to Mauritius, including \$729 million in lines of credit and \$427 million in grants. Key projects include three phases of the Metro Express and 96 small-scale infrastructure initiatives, with 51 already completed.
- **India as a First Responder:**
 - India has been a reliable partner, supporting Mauritius during crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the Wakashio oil spill in 2020, and a recent cyclone.
- **Trade and Investment:**
 - Mauritius is a significant economic partner for India, ranking as the second-largest source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into India, after Singapore. The two



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countries signed the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement in 2021, marking India's first trade deal with an African nation.

- **Space Cooperation:**

- India and Mauritius have collaborated in space research since 1986, and in 2023, ISRO and the Mauritius Research and Innovation Council (MRIC) signed an MoU to develop a joint satellite, strengthening their space cooperation.

- **Capacity Building and Education:**

- Mauritius is a key beneficiary of India's ITEC programme, with nearly 4,940 Mauritians trained since 2002-03. Additionally, around 2,300 Indian students pursue higher education in Mauritius in fields such as medicine, hotel management, and business studies.

- **Cultural and Historical Connections:**

- Modi's visit also highlighted the shared cultural legacy, including the influence of Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, whose ancestors came from Bihar, and celebrated common traditions like Maha Shivratri and the Ganga Talao pilgrimage site.

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