

CHAGOS ISLANDS: INTERNATIONAL RELATION

NEWS: The story of Chagos, the Indian Ocean archipelago that Mauritius claims, UK controls

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The Chagos Islands dispute between Mauritius and the UK has been ongoing since Mauritius' independence in 1968, with the UK recognizing Mauritius' sovereignty in 2024 while retaining control over Diego Garcia for military purposes. The resolution has strategic implications for India amid growing Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean region.

Chagos Islands Overview:

- **Location:** The Chagos Islands are located in the Indian Ocean, approximately 1,600 km northeast of Mauritius.
- **Land Area:** The total land area of the islands is 56.1 square kilometers, with Diego Garcia covering 32.5 square kilometers, which is comparable to the size of Lakshadweep Island in India.
- **Largest Atoll:** The Great Chagos Bank, which covers an area of 12,642 square kilometers, is the world's largest atoll structure.

Chagos Islands Dispute:

- **Disputed Territory:** The Chagos Islands have been a longstanding point of contention between Mauritius and the United Kingdom (UK) since Mauritius gained independence in 1968.
- **UK's Recognition of Mauritius' Sovereignty:** In 2024, the UK recognized Mauritius' sovereignty over the Chagos Islands, although it retained control over Diego Garcia, the largest island of the archipelago.

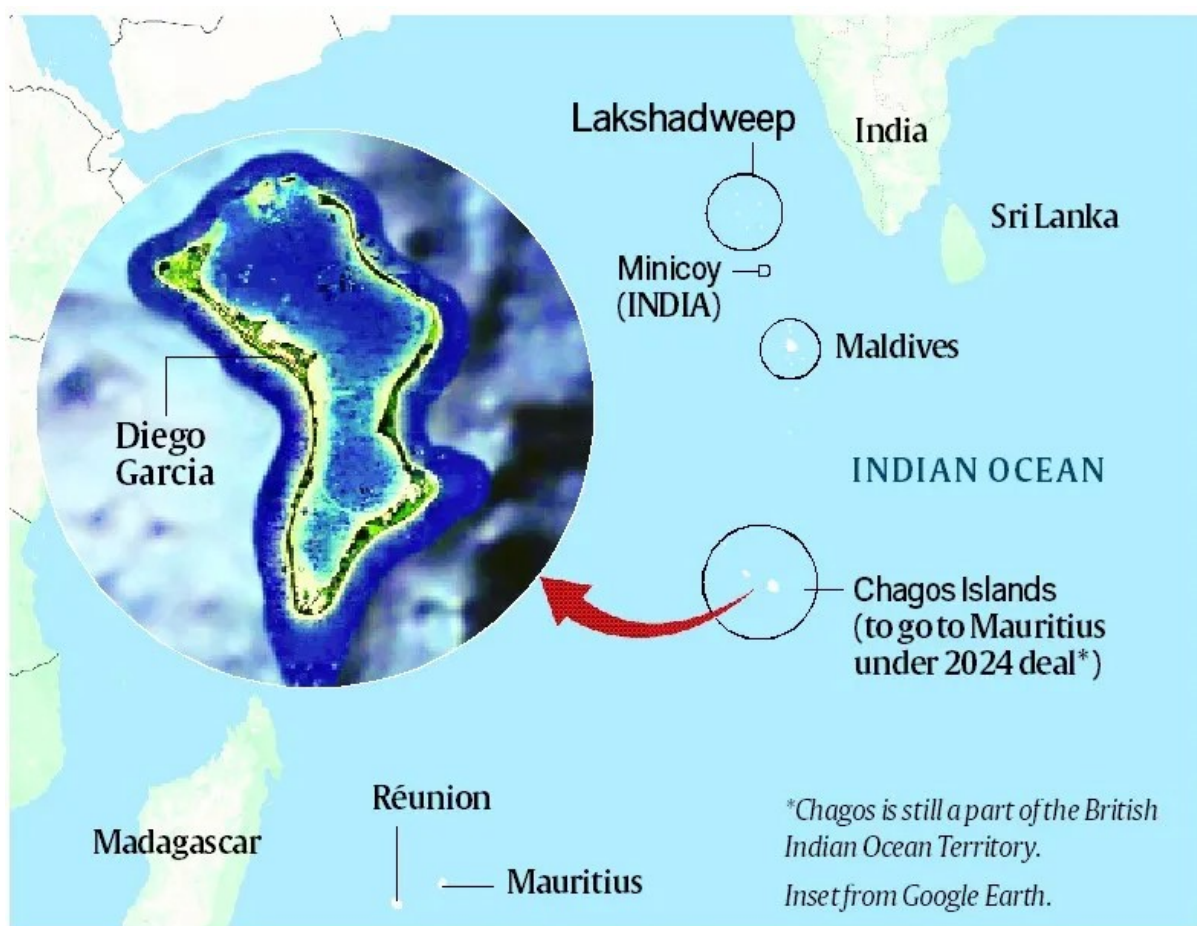
Strategic Importance of Diego Garcia:

- **Military Base:** Diego Garcia hosts a joint UK-US military base, which plays a crucial role in military operations across Asia and the Indian Ocean. The base has been strategically important for operations in several conflicts.
- **Formation of the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT):**
 - In 1965, the UK created the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), which separated the Chagos Islands from Mauritius.
 - The UK paid £3 million to Mauritius for the removal of the islands from its territory.
- **US-UK Agreement (1966):**

- A secret agreement between the UK and the US in 1966 allowed for the establishment of a US military base on Diego Garcia, making the island critical for military activities in the region.
- The base became fully operational in 1986, and it was used in the 1990-91 Gulf War, Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and continues to serve as a key military outpost for the UK and US in the Indian Ocean.

Diplomatic Developments:

- **Mauritius' Diplomatic Efforts:**
 - Mauritius has raised the issue of Chagos' sovereignty in various international fora for decades, seeking recognition of its claim to the islands.
- **2017 UN General Assembly (UNGA):**
 - The UNGA passed a resolution calling for an International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on the legal status of the Chagos Archipelago.
- **2019 ICJ Ruling:**
 - The ICJ ruled that the UK must end its administration of the Chagos Islands "as rapidly as possible" due to its illegal occupation of the territory.
- **2019 UNGA Resolution:**
 - The UNGA passed a resolution demanding the UK's unconditional withdrawal



from the Chagos Islands within six months.

2024 UK-Mauritius Agreement:

- **Terms of the Deal:**
 - The UK formally recognized Mauritius' sovereignty over the Chagos Islands, including Diego Garcia.
 - However, Diego Garcia remains under UK control for military operations for a period of 99 years.
 - Mauritius has the right to resettle the Chagossian people on the islands, except Diego Garcia.
- **Impact on India:**
 - The Chagos dispute has strategic implications for India, particularly in light of the growing influence of China in the region.
 - India facilitated the agreement between Mauritius and the UK, strengthening its position as a leader of the developing world and increasing its influence in the Indian Ocean region.

This dispute is not only a matter of territorial sovereignty but also involves significant geopolitical and military considerations, especially with regards to the strategic military importance of Diego Garcia in global military operations.

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