

INDIA'S MARITIME POLICY

NEWS: **India's maritime policy** has undergone a significant **evolution** from the launch of **SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)** in 2015 to the newly announced **MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions)** in 2025.

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

MAHASAGAR Vision: India's Expanding Maritime Strategy

Introduction

- **Launch:** The **MAHASAGAR** vision was unveiled by the **Indian Prime Minister** during his two-day visit to **Mauritius**.
- **Objective:** Reaffirms **India's commitment** to strengthening maritime security, trade, and development cooperation within the **Global South**.
- **Context:** The announcement comes at a time when **China is expanding its influence** in the **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)** through aggressive economic and military activities.

India's Role in the Indo-Pacific and the Global South

1. Growing Demand for Reliable Partners

- **Global South Nations' Concerns:** Medium and smaller nations in the **Indian Ocean, Africa, ASEAN, and the Pacific** are seeking reliable partners with a history of **credibility, competence, and empathy**.
- **China's Debt Trap Diplomacy:** Countries like **Sri Lanka (economic crisis)** and **Pakistan (loan dependency)** have faced financial difficulties due to **Chinese predatory lending practices**.
- **Need for Trustworthy Alternatives:** India's **sustainable financing, developmental approach, and respect for sovereignty** make it a preferred partner.

2. India as an Empathetic Partner

- **Non-Exploitative Engagement:** India's policies focus on **capacity building, economic resilience, and development cooperation**, ensuring long-term stability.
- **Maritime Security Leadership:** India is seen as a **net security provider**, enhancing **anti-piracy measures, maritime domain awareness, and disaster relief efforts**.

About MAHASAGAR

1. What is MAHASAGAR?

- **MAHASAGAR** is India's **ambitious strategic vision** designed to strengthen:

- **Maritime security**
- **Trade and economic partnerships**
- **Development cooperation**
- **Disaster resilience**
- **Geographical Reach:** The policy expands across the **Global South**, covering:
 - **Africa**
 - **ASEAN countries**
 - **Latin America**
 - **Pacific Island Nations**

2. Evolution from SAGAR to MAHASAGAR

- **SAGAR (2015) Focus:**
 - **Maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).**
 - **Strengthening sustainable development and regional cooperation.**
- **MAHASAGAR (2025) Expansion:**
 - **Beyond the Indian Ocean to cover Indo-Pacific and emerging economies.**
 - **Strengthening connectivity, disaster resilience, and humanitarian aid.**
 - **Deepening economic and cultural partnerships with island nations.**

About SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)

1. SAGAR: India's 2015 Strategic Vision for IOR

- **Aim:** Strengthen **maritime security, economic development, and regional stability** in the **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)**.
- **Key Role:** Positioned **India as a security provider** in the IOR.

2. Key Objectives of SAGAR

1. Maritime Security:

- **Enhanced naval cooperation, anti-piracy operations, and surveillance.**
- **Development of maritime domain awareness (MDA) systems.**

2. Economic Growth & Blue Economy:

- **Promotion of sustainable fisheries, deep-sea mining, and maritime trade.**

3. Disaster Resilience:

- **Rapid response aid** for cyclones, oil spills, and humanitarian crises.
4. **Regional Connectivity:**
- Strengthening **port infrastructure and digital trade routes**.
5. **Environmental Protection:**
- **Climate change mitigation, marine conservation, and pollution control**.



3. Implementation Examples of SAGAR

- **Naval Partnerships:** Enhanced security cooperation with **Mauritius, Seychelles, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and East African nations**.
- **Humanitarian Assistance:**
 - **Oil spill response (Mauritius, 2020).**
 - **Cyclone disaster relief operations.**
 - **COVID-19 medical aid shipments to IOR countries.**
- **Defense Strengthening:**
 - **MILAN naval exercises (2024):** 50+ nations participated.
 - **Coordinated Patrols (CORPATs):** Strengthened regional security.

Why Shift from SAGAR to MAHASAGAR?

1. Expanding India's Strategic Vision

- **SAGAR focused on IOR, whereas MAHASAGAR extends India's reach to Indo-Pacific, Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific Islands.**

2. Addressing Growing Geopolitical Challenges

- **China's expanding influence** in the Indian Ocean, Africa, and Pacific necessitates **stronger countermeasures.**

3. Economic & Trade Expansion

- **Enhancing blue economy partnerships, digital trade, and maritime logistics** with emerging economies.

4. Holistic Security Approach

- **Addressing modern threats like:**
 - **Cybersecurity risks**
 - **Piracy and illegal fishing**
 - **Climate change-driven maritime disasters**

Geopolitical Implications of MAHASAGAR

1. Alignment with Indo-Pacific Policies

- **Strengthens India's Indo-Pacific vision** and complements **QUAD's strategy for a free and open Indo-Pacific.**

2. Countering China's Influence

- **Offers an India-led model for maritime cooperation** against China's **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** expansion.

3. Positioning India as a Global South Leader

- **Advocating for developing nations** in platforms like **G20, IORA, BRICS.**

4. Strengthening India's Presence in Africa and Latin America

- **Expanding economic and security ties** with **African and Latin American nations.**

5. Mauritius' Central Role in India's IOR Strategy

- **Mauritius hosts major Indian strategic projects, including:**
 - **Coastal Surveillance Radar Systems.**
 - **Port and airstrip developments** (Agalega Island, ₹192 million project).

Government Initiatives Supporting MAHASAGAR

1. **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) (2019)**
 - **Non-treaty-based framework for maritime security, connectivity, and sustainable development.**
2. **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)**
 - **Trade, maritime security, and disaster response cooperation among 23 member states.**
3. **Quad Maritime Security Initiatives**
 - **Collaborations with the US, Japan, and Australia for:**
 - **Joint naval exercises.**
 - **Maritime domain awareness.**
 - **Combating illegal fishing and smuggling.**
4. **Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)**
 - **Real-time maritime intelligence-sharing to enhance regional security.**
5. **India-Africa Maritime Cooperation**
 - **Strengthening naval partnerships for port development, naval training, and anti-piracy operations.**
6. **Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) (2022)**
 - **Ensuring resilient supply chains and digital trade connectivity.**

Challenges for India's Engagement with Global South

1. Strategic Competition with China

- **China's BRI projects, naval bases, and maritime expansion pose challenges.**

2. Overlapping Regional Organizations

- **Example: Mauritius is part of IORA, Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), and Colombo Security Conclave (CSC), causing coordination challenges.**

3. Resource Constraints

- **India must balance naval modernization and infrastructure funding with domestic priorities.**

4. Climate Change & Maritime Disasters

- **Rising sea levels and extreme weather events require stronger resilience strategies.**

5. Political Instability in Partner Nations

- Leadership changes in countries like **Maldives and Mauritius** can impact long-term cooperation.

6. Violation of UNCLOS 1982

- **China's territorial claims** threaten regional stability and **freedom of navigation**.

Way Forward

- **Deepen Indo-Pacific partnerships** through diplomatic and naval collaborations.
- **Strengthen disaster relief mechanisms** with pre-positioned supplies in strategic locations.
- **Expand Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)** via IFC-IOR.
- **Uphold UNCLOS 1982** to protect sovereign maritime rights.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/modis-mahasagar-indias-big-bet-on-maritime-power-and-the-global-south-9889711/>