

## INDIA-SOUTH AFRICA MARITIME PARTNERSHIP – INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

NEWS: India and South Africa signed two agreements on submarine cooperation during the 9th Joint Defence Committee meeting in Johannesburg.

- While the specifics of these deals have yet to be fully detailed, it signals a **potential deepening of maritime ties** between influential Indian Ocean powers.

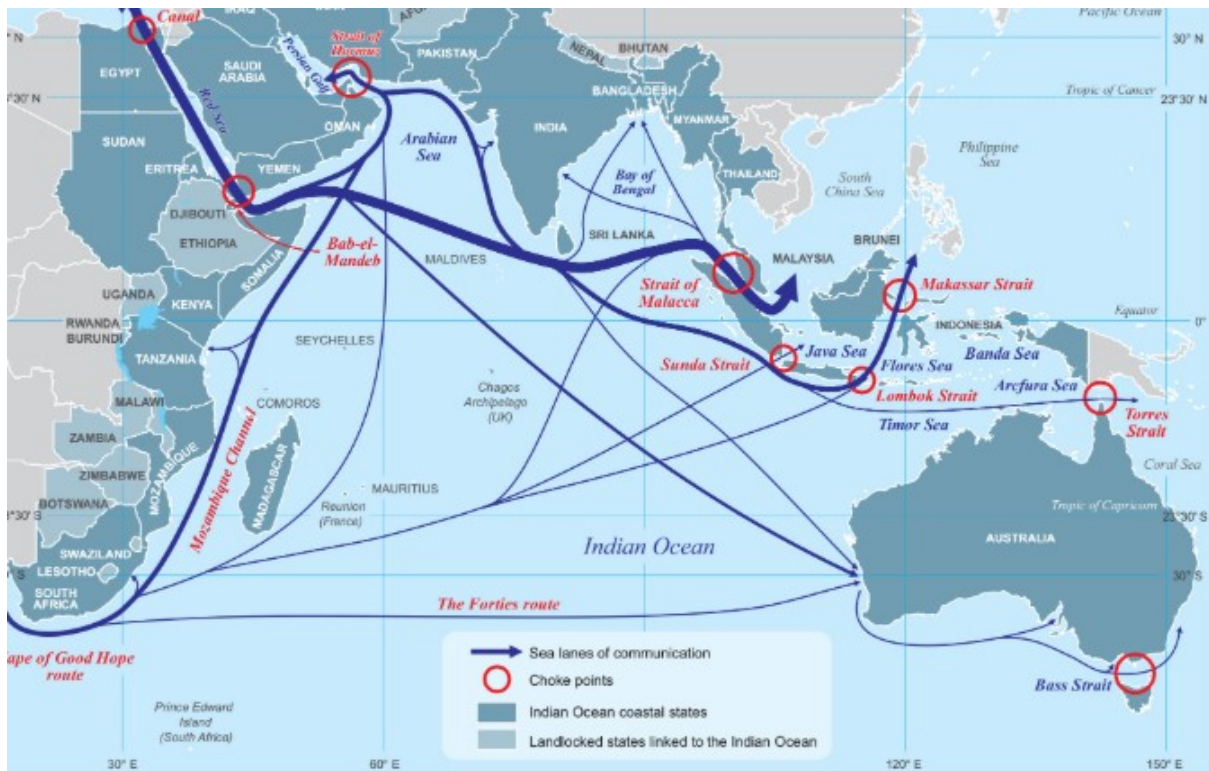
### WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

#### Strategic Significance of Bilateral Cooperation

- **Blue-Water Naval Reach:**  
India's aim to become a dominant blue-water navy requires greater presence across key oceanic spaces. Cooperation with South Africa enhances India's operational reach across both the **Indian Ocean** and **South Atlantic**, crucial for countering maritime threats and securing sea lanes.
- **Comprehensive Security Cooperation:**  
Beyond the scope of submarine rescue agreements, bilateral defence ties now include **training exchanges, maritime surveillance, joint R&D, and capacity-building**, addressing shared concerns like **piracy, arms and human trafficking**, and **strategic rivalries** in the Indo-Atlantic space.
- **Defence Industrial Synergy:**  
India's emerging defence manufacturing capabilities—including in shipbuilding, missile systems, and naval platforms—align with South Africa's ambitions to **modernise its navy** and revitalise its **defence sector**, making room for potential co-production and technology transfers.
- **Historical-Diplomatic Foundation:**  
The relationship is grounded in a **shared anti-colonial legacy** and commitment to **South-South cooperation**. This historical convergence lends strength to present-day military and diplomatic alignment in forums like **BRICS, IBSA**, and the **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)**.

#### India–South Africa Relations: Evolution and Key Areas

- **Historical Solidarity:**  
India was a strong and early opponent of apartheid, becoming the **first country to sever trade ties** in 1946. It played a leading role in the **UN and Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)** to impose sanctions on South Africa's apartheid regime.
- **Diplomatic Ties:**  
Formal diplomatic relations were restored in **1993**, followed by the **Red Fort Declaration of 1997**, which established a **Strategic Partnership**. The year **2023** marked **30 years** of renewed diplomatic ties.



- **Defence and Maritime Linkages:**

Defence cooperation commenced in **1996**, with key initiatives including:

- **IBSAMAR** (India-Brazil-South Africa Maritime exercises)
- Participation in **MILAN**, India's multilateral naval exercise
- South Africa's involvement in the **India-Africa Defence Dialogue**
- Deployment of liaison officers to India's **Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)**

- **Political and Multilateral Engagement:**

High-level coordination continues through **BRICS**, **G20**, and **IBSA** forums.

President **Cyril Ramaphosa** was the **Chief Guest** at India's **Republic Day** celebrations in **2019**, signifying close political engagement.

- **Trade and Economic Relations:**

Bilateral trade stood at **\$19.25 billion in 2023–24**. Key trade components:

- **India's exports:** Vehicles, pharmaceuticals, rice, and chemicals
- **India's imports:** Gold, coal, copper ore, phosphoric acid, and manganese
- India is among **South Africa's top 10 trading partners**

- **Skill Development and Education:**

India established the **Gandhi–Mandela Centre of Specialisation in Pretoria** (2021) to train South African artisans.

South African professionals also benefit from **ITEC programmes**, promoting knowledge-sharing and capacity-building.

- **Indian Diaspora:**

South Africa is home to a **1.7 million-strong Indian-origin community**, providing a vital cultural and economic bridge between both countries.

### **Key Challenges in Deepening Maritime Partnership**

- **Fragile Political Landscape in South Africa:**

A **fragmented political environment**, economic stagnation, and internal coalition dynamics challenge the sustainability of long-term defence commitments.

Frequent leadership changes and governance instability may hinder consistent strategic engagement.

- **Foreign Policy Orientation:**

South Africa's foreign policy often reflects **ideological solidarity with liberation movements** and **continental priorities** over practical bilateral defence partnerships. Maritime security, while important, is not an existential concern like it is for India.

- **Conflicting Priorities:**

South Africa faces pressing domestic issues such as **economic recovery, inequality, social unrest, and unemployment**. These internal pressures may deprioritise external defence engagements.

- **Strategic Divergence:**

India views the **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)** as vital to its economic and geostrategic interests, whereas South Africa primarily focuses on **continental African affairs**, with **limited naval projection capabilities** in the Indian Ocean.

### **Way Forward**

- **Submarine Agreements as a New Chapter:**

The recently concluded agreements on **submarine rescue operations** signal a new phase in India–South Africa strategic ties, reflecting deeper operational trust and interoperability.

- **South Africa's Domestic Reforms Required:**

To fully realise the benefits of this defence partnership, South Africa must address its **economic constraints**, stabilise its **political landscape**, and commit resources to maritime security.

- **India's Strategic Challenge:**

India must ensure that its growing defence outreach in Africa results in **practical and operational outcomes**, and does not remain confined to **summit-level declarations** and **ceremonial visits**.

- **Focus on Joint Capacity Building:**

Both nations should prioritise **naval training, technology sharing, and coordinated maritime surveillance**, especially in the western Indian Ocean and southern Atlantic corridors.

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