



## Twin Hurdles Hinder India's Maritime Role

**For Prelims:** QUAD, Maritime Domain Awareness Initiative (MDA), Indo Pacific region, IF-IOR

**For Mains:** Initiatives, Issues and challenges in QUAD groupings, Indo Pacific region

### Why in News?

Recently, [QUAD grouping](#) consisting of India, Australia, Japan and the US rolled out an **Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) initiative** for information sharing and maritime surveillance across the Indo Pacific region.

- But **infrastructure constraints and continued delay in posting Indian liaison officers** limit India's ability to further expand its role.

### What is the Indo Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness Initiative (IPMDA)?

- The **IPMDA initiative was announced at the Quad Leaders' Summit in Tokyo, 2022 to track "dark shipping"** and to build a "faster, wider, and more accurate maritime picture of near-real-time activities in partners' waters" **integrating three critical regions in the Indo-Pacific – the Pacific Islands, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).**
  - **Dark ships** are vessels with their Automatic Identification System (AIS) - a transponder system - switched off so as not to be detectable.
- It will **also allow tracking other tactical-level activities**, such as rendezvous at sea, as well as improve partners' ability to respond to climate and humanitarian events and to protect their fisheries, which are vital to many Indo-Pacific economies.
- The IPMDA will **help QUAD countries as well as littoral states in the backdrop of expanding Chinese naval presence** across the region.
- This will **further increase the existing role of Indian Liaison Officers** in building linkages with various agencies in their home countries.

### What are the Two Issues that Limit India's Role?

- **Infrastructure constraints:** This includes not only shipbuilding and ship repair but also modernisation and hinterland connectivity through rail and road network for integrated development of both the coastal and the interior regions of India.
  - It also includes coastal shipping. Due to infrastructure constraints, India cannot induct the postings of **International Liaison Officers (ILO)** at the **Indian Navy's [Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region \(IFC-IOR\)](#).**
    - India has signed [white shipping exchange agreements](#) with 22 countries and one multi-national grouping.
    - The white shipping information refers to an exchange of relevant advance information on the identity and movement of commercial non-military merchant vessels.
    - Ships can be classified into white (commercial ships), grey (military vessels), and

black (illegal vessels).

- It is not just important to have ILOs in India, but also equally important that Indian Navy officers be posted at similar centers in other countries.

- **Continued delay in posting Indian liaison officers** at other facilities and centers in the region:
  - Proposals to post Indian Naval Liaison Officers (LO) at the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC), Madagascar, and the Regional Coordination Operations Centre, Seychelles, have been pending for more than two years.
  - Another proposal to post an LO at the European-led mission in the [Strait of Hormuz](#) (EMASOH) in Abu Dhabi has also not been approved so far.
  - There is a **delay in continuing the present LOs** as well. For instance, India has had an LO at the IFC in Singapore since 2009.

## What is the Information Fusion Centre - Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)?

- The Information Fusion Centre - Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) hosted by the Indian Navy, was established by the Government of India at Gurugram in December 2018 to further Maritime Safety and Security in the Indian Ocean Region.
- IFC-IOR was envisaged to address the very need to promote collaboration for maritime safety and security in view of the region's importance with respect to world trade and security.
- Since its inception, the Centre has established working level linkages with more than 50 nations and multinational/ maritime security centers.

## Way Forward

- With the impetus of the IPMDA, the overall realm of improving linkages of the IFC-IOR with the other IFCs and eventually becoming the repository for all maritime data in the IOR. So, the pending proposals need to be address quickly otherwise India will lose this opportunity.
- The initiative will lose steam if not acted upon immediately as countries will lose interest.
- Development of Indian infrastructure is essential for country's economic development and growth. As India adopted growth-led economic policy, India needs to develop our maritime infrastructure, be it in developing our ports and harbours, connectivity, logistics etc.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question

**Q. The term 'Digital Single Market Strategy' seen in the news refers to (2017)**

- (a) ASEAN
- (b) BRICS
- (c) EU
- (d) G20

**Ans: (c)**

**Exp:**

- The 'Digital Single Market Strategy' was adopted by the European Union (EU) on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2015. It includes 16 specific initiatives which aim to open up digital opportunities for people and business and to enhance Europe's position as a world leader in the digital economy.
- The strategy is built on three policy pillars:
  - **Access:** Better access for consumers and businesses to digital goods and services across Europe,
  - **Environment:** Creating the right conditions and a level playing field for digital networks and innovative services to flourish,
  - **Economy and Society:** Maximising the growth potential of the digital economy. **Therefore, option (c) is the correct answer.**

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