



6th Indian Ocean Conference

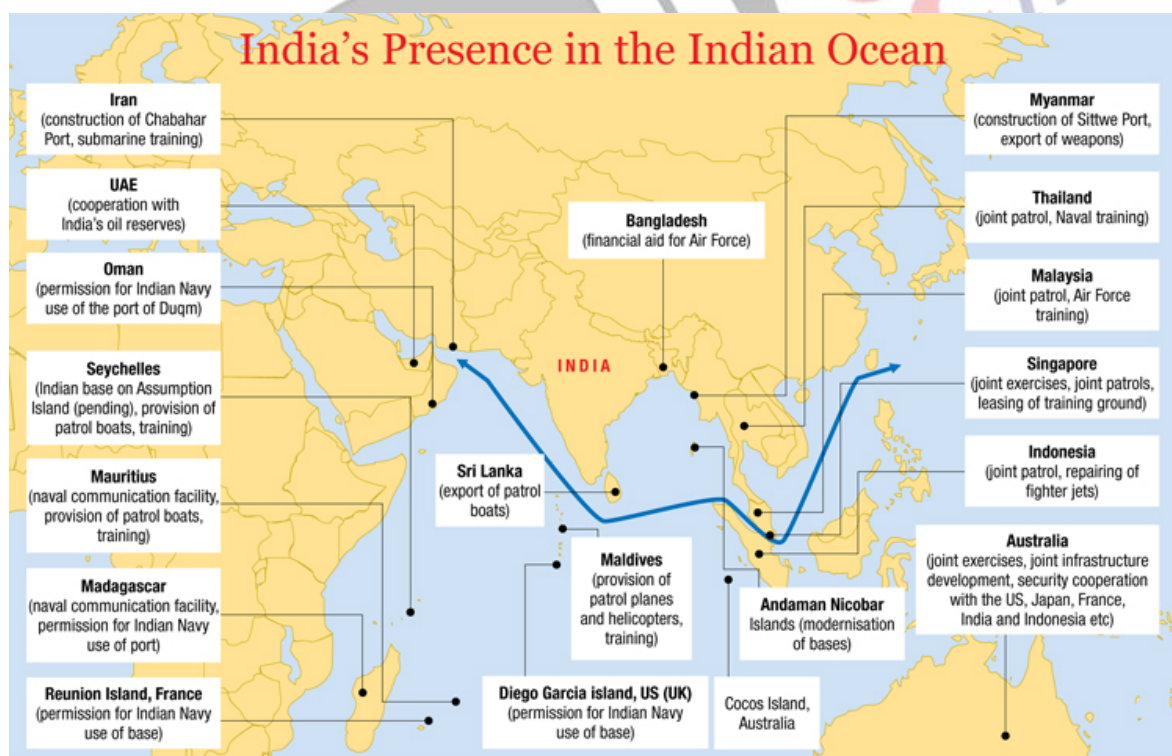
For Prelims: [Indian Ocean region](#), [Association of Southeast Asian Nations \(ASEAN\)](#), [Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation \(BIMSTEC\)](#), [Climate change](#), [Marine pollution](#).

For Mains: Major Challenges Related to the Indian Ocean Region.

Why in News?

Improving and enhancing connectivity in the [Indian Ocean region](#) emerged as a top priority during the **6th Indian Ocean Conference** held in **Dhaka, Bangladesh**.

- The conference, with the theme "**Peace Prosperity and Partnership for a Resilient Future**," brought together delegates from over 25 countries to discuss ways to promote **economic development while maintaining peace and stability in the region**.



What are the Major Highlights of the Conference?

- **Connectivity:** India, being a significant player in the **Indian Ocean region**, faces distinct challenges in achieving enhanced connectivity.
 - **Establishing a land connection with Southeast Asia** poses unique difficulties for India.

Despite the challenges, there is a call for collective efforts to overcome obstacles and improve connectivity.

- The Indian Foreign Minister emphasized the potential game-changing impact of establishing an effective and efficient connectivity with the [Association of Southeast Asian Nations \(ASEAN\)](#).
- India also aspires to develop **multi-model connectivity to the Gulf and Central Asia**.
- To tackle the connectivity challenges and promote regional development, countries in the Indian Ocean region need to embrace cooperation and adopt a **long-term perspective**:
 - Examples like the [Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation \(BIMSTEC\)](#) demonstrate the significance of deeper cooperation and shared efforts.
- **Upholding Legal Obligations and Agreements:** Disregarding legal obligations or violating long-standing agreements can **undermine trust and confidence among member nations**. Taking a long-term view of cooperation is essential to ensure sustained progress.
 - Adherence to international law, norms, and rules is vital for building a stable international order.
- **Sustainable Projects and Debt:** Unsustainable debt generated by unviable projects is a concern for countries in the region. (**Example-Sri Lanka**).
 - **Encouraging transparent lending practices** and considering market realities are necessary to avoid future complications.
- **Shared Responsibility and Focus:** The Indian Ocean region requires shared responsibility and focused efforts to ensure its stability and prosperity:
 - **Ensuring maritime security is a collective responsibility** that should not be compromised for individual dominance. Practical action is needed, complementing diplomatic positions.
 - The conference also highlighted the **importance of climate action and counter-terrorism initiatives**. Nations must also address the threats posed by **extremism and fundamentalism, safeguarding their social fabrics**.

What is Indian Ocean Conference?

- Indian Ocean Conference is a flagship consultative forum of the Indian Ocean countries to deliberate upon the prospects of regional cooperation for [Security and Growth for All in the Region \(SAGAR\)](#).
- The first edition of the Indian Ocean conference was held in Singapore in 2016 and fifth in 2021 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

What are the Major Challenges Related to the Indian Ocean Region?

- **Geopolitical Competition:** The Indian Ocean region is a hotspot for geopolitical competition among **major powers and regional actors**. The competition involves **strategic interests, influence, and access to resources, leading to tensions and potential conflicts**.
 - The **Indian Ocean** occupies a central position between the major global powers, including **India, China, the United States**, and countries of the Middle East and Africa.
 - Its location allows for power projection and influence over regional affairs. The presence of key chokepoints such as the **Strait of Hormuz, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, and the Malacca Strait** further enhances its strategic significance.
- **China's Militarization Move:** China has been a **challenge to India's interests and stability in the Indian Ocean**.
 - India's neighbors are receiving **military and infrastructural assistance from China**, including **submarines for Myanmar, frigates for Sri Lanka, and its overseas military base in Djibouti (Horn of Africa)**.
 - Also, [China has a hold over Hambantota port \(Sri Lanka\)](#), which is just a few hundred miles off the shores of India.
- **Maritime Security Threats:** The IOR is vulnerable to various maritime security

threats, including [piracy](#), [smuggling](#), [illegal fishing](#), and [terrorism](#).

- Also, the vastness of the Indian Ocean makes it challenging to **monitor and secure its maritime domain effectively**.

- **Environmental Challenges:** [Climate change](#), [rising sea levels](#), [coral reef degradation](#), and [marine pollution](#) are significant environmental challenges in the IOR.
 - These issues affect **coastal communities, marine ecosystems**, and the livelihoods of millions of people.

Way Forward

- **Driving Blue Economy Initiatives:** The IOR is rich in marine resources, and leveraging the blue economy can drive sustainable economic growth. There is a need to include **promoting renewable energy generation** from ocean resources, supporting sustainable fisheries, **developing marine biotechnology**, and **fostering eco-tourism**.
- **Maritime Security Collaboration:** Given the strategic importance of the IOR, enhancing maritime security is crucial.
 - There is a need to involve **strengthening information-sharing mechanisms, leveraging technology for maritime domain awareness, promoting joint naval exercises and patrols**, and fostering cooperation in countering maritime threats such as **piracy, illegal fishing, and smuggling**.
- **Climate Change Resilience:** The IOR is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and ocean acidification. Innovative strategies could focus on **implementing climate-resilient infrastructure, developing early warning systems**, promoting **sustainable coastal management practices**, and facilitating **regional cooperation for climate change adaptation and mitigation**.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. India is a member of which among the following? (2015)

1. Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
2. Association of South-East Asian Nations
3. East Asia Summit

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 3 only
- (c) 1, 2 and 3
- (d) India is a member of none of them

Ans: (b)

Mains

Q.1 What is the significance of Indo-US defense deals over Indo-Russian defense deals? Discuss with reference to stability in the Indo-Pacific region. **(2020)**

Source: IE

