



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**RIISING SIGNIFICANCE OF THE
WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN**

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Context

- The **Western Indian Ocean (WIO)** has emerged as a pivotal maritime region where security, trade, and diplomacy converge, once seen as a remote expanse, and a peripheral concern in global geopolitics.

About the Western Indian Ocean (WIO)

- It stretches from the **eastern coast of Africa to the Arabian Sea**, encompassing countries like *Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa, Comoros, Madagascar, Seychelles, Mauritius, and Réunion*.



- It connects **key maritime chokepoints** like Bab el-Mandeb, the Mozambique Channel, and the Strait of Hormuz, making it a vital corridor for **energy and trade**.
- It is one of the busiest and most closely monitored maritime corridors in the world, stretching from the **Horn of Africa to the Mozambique Channel**, and dotted with **island nations like Seychelles, Mauritius, and Madagascar**.
- It is home to about 36 countries and almost 40% of the world's coastline, making it a vital hub for commerce and connectivity that fuel economies across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.

Maritime Security Challenges

- Piracy and Armed Robbery:** The resurgence of piracy off Somalia and narcotics trafficking from Afghanistan pose persistent threats to maritime security.
 - Recent disruptions in the **Red Sea and Gulf of Aden** have reignited concerns.
- Narcotics and Illicit Trafficking:** Indian Navy operations, such as the seizure of 2,500 kg of narcotics by INS Tarkash, highlight the region's vulnerability to transnational crime.
- Non-Traditional Threats:** Climate change, illegal fishing, and maritime disasters require coordinated responses.
 - There is a need for enhanced **Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)** through real-time data sharing among regional stakeholders.

- **China's Naval Expansion:** China's growing presence, including naval activity and infrastructure investments, has added a layer of strategic competition in the region.
 - ♦ Recently, China's **48th Naval Escort Fleet**, comprising the destroyer *Tangshan* and the frigate *Daqing*, embarked on **anti-piracy mission** to the **Gulf of Aden**.
 - ♦ China's **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** has driven massive investment in WIO port infrastructure — from **Djibouti**, where **its first overseas military base** is located, to **Gwadar** in Pakistan.
 - ♦ China's deployment of **research and survey vessels** in the eastern Indian Ocean further reveals **dual objectives**: mapping seabeds for scientific purposes while potentially enhancing **submarine warfare capabilities**.
- **Climate-Induced Disasters:** Rising sea levels, coral bleaching, and extreme weather events threaten coastal communities and marine ecosystems.

India's Maritime Strategy and Regional Engagement

- India's maritime approach emphasizes **partnerships, trust, and a rules-based order**, unlike China.
 - ♦ While **India never issued** an explicit '**Monroe Doctrine**' for the Indian Ocean, its influence has been widely acknowledged among littoral nations.
- **Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR Doctrine):** It integrates defence cooperation, capacity building, humanitarian aid, and environmental protection.
- **Combined Maritime Forces (CMF):** India's participation in CMF and its support for regional capacity-building through naval exercises and humanitarian missions reflect its growing influence.
- **Environmental and Economic Projects:** Projects like SOLSTICE-WIO, endorsed by INCOIS, aim to enhance ecosystem research and promote sustainable livelihoods in coastal communities.
 - ♦ The region's estimated natural resource value exceeds US\$ 300 billion, underscoring the need for balanced development.
- **Operational Strength:** India strengthens interoperability with partners, through naval exercises like **Konkan 2024**.
 - ♦ The **Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)** in Gurugram acts as a regional intelligence hub, connecting India with African and Indo-Pacific nations for real-time maritime awareness, disaster response, and climate resilience.
- **The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)** and partnerships with **France, the US, Japan, and Australia** reflect India's commitment to multilateral stability.
- Access to key facilities such as **Duqm Port (Oman)** and **Réunion Island (France)** enhances India's operational reach and rapid response capability.

Africa's Central Role

- The WIO region forms a **critical bridge between Africa and Asia**. India's growing ties with these nations are both strategic and developmental.
- **Partnership in Action:**
 - ♦ In **Mauritius**: India has invested over **\$680 million** in infrastructure, healthcare, and maritime security, including Port Louis redevelopment.
 - ♦ In **Seychelles**: Joint naval training enhances local defence capabilities.
 - ♦ In **Mozambique**: India's participation in the **\$20 billion LNG project** with TotalEnergies boosts regional energy resilience and local employment.
- India's engagement aligns with **Africa's Agenda 2063**, emphasizing skills development, blue economy growth, and sustainable governance — positioning India as a partner of choice over debt-laden alternatives.

Way Forward

- **Safeguarding Critical Chokepoints:** The WIO hosts some of the world's most vital maritime chokepoints — the **Strait of Hormuz**, **Bab el-Mandeb**, and the **Mozambique Channel** — through which much of India's oil supply flows.

- ♦ India collaborates with regional and global partners, including **France, the UAE, the US, and Saudi Arabia**, conducting joint patrols, information-sharing missions, and maritime security exercises, to secure these arteries.
- **Balancing Power with Responsibility:** Smaller island states prioritize **climate security, sustainability, and development** — areas where India's inclusive, capacity-building approach resonates strongly.
 - ♦ By linking defence assistance with environmental and developmental initiatives, India distinguishes itself as a **responsible maritime power** rather than a hegemon.
- **Shaping the Region's Future:** The Western Indian Ocean stands at the **crossroads of security, trade, and diplomacy**. As China expands its presence, India's sustained engagement through partnership-driven policies ensures that the region remains open, stable, and secure.
 - ♦ For India, the WIO is the **strategic heart of its Indo-Pacific vision** and its actions will define the regional balance of power, economic interdependence, and maritime governance for decades to come.

Source: First Post

Daily Mains Practice Question

[Q] Discuss the factors contributing to the rising strategic significance of the Western Indian Ocean and evaluate how regional and extra-regional powers are reshaping its geopolitical landscape.

