INDIA FOUNDATION JOURNAL

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About India Foundation

India Foundation is an independent research centre focussed on the issues, challenges, and opportunities of the Indian polity. The Foundation believes in understanding contemporary India and its global context through the civilizational lens of a society on the forward move. Based on the principles of independence, objectivity and academic rigour, the Foundation aims at increasing awareness and advocating its views on issues of both national and international importance.

With a team of dedicated professionals based at its office in New Delhi, the Foundation works with partners and associates both in India and overseas to further its stated objectives.

About India Foundation Journal

The India Foundation Journal is led by an Editorial Board of eminent scholars and leaders from various spheres of Indian public life. The bi-monthly journal covers a wide range of issues pertinent to the national interest, mainly focusing on international relations, national security, legal and constitutional issues and other issues of social, religious and political significance. The journal seeks articles from scholars with the intent of creating a significant body of knowledge with a nationalist perspective and establish a recognised forum for debates involving academicians and policymakers.

The Future is in the Oceans

Dhruv C. Katoch*

Viksit Bharat @2047—the vision to make India a developed nation by 2047, India's centenary year of independence, includes within its ambit, economic growth, good governance, social progress and environmental sustainability. With respect to economic growth, Finance Minister Smt Nirmala Sitharaman, while speaking at the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit in Gandhinagar on 10 January 2024, stated that the Indian economy was planned to grow to the order of USD 5 trillion by 2028 and to USD 30 trillion by 2047.[1] This is certainly an ambitious undertaking, but considering how India has progressed to the fifth place in GDP terms in the world economy over the last decade, this futuristic projection is by no means unattainable. It would however require a focused thrust in multiple areas, one of which is on exports.

India's exports, during the last financial year stood at USD 765.6 billion. This would have to increase manyfold over the coming years to enable India to reach the target of becoming a USD 5 trillion economy by 2028 and a USD 30 trillion economy by 2047. As per Niti Aayog, India's exports would need to be increased to the order of USD 1.6 trillion by 2030, USD 4.1 trillion by 2040 and USD 8.7 trillion by 2047.[2] This means that India's exports would have to double from current levels over the next six years. The subsequent 10 years would once again require a 2.5 times increase in exports from the 2030 level and the next seven years thereafter would need exports to be doubled again from that achieved in 1940. Overall, India's exports would have to increase by eleven times from current levels to achieve the desired growth rate by 2047. Imports too would need to rise to USD 1.9 trillion by 2030, USD 5.9 trillion by 2040, and USD 12.1 trillion by 2047.[3] As this trade would largely be carried out in ship-borne containers, it highlights the importance of the sea lanes of communication for India's growth and prosperity. India's growth story is hence intricately linked to its blue economy, shipping industry, ports, maritime growth, and peace and stability in the Indian Ocean region.

Trade: The Engine of Growth

When viewed in the global context, trade remains a major driver of economic transformation. In the 18th century, it was the British Empires's success in international trade that led to the industrial revolution. Towards the latter half of the twentieth century, the growth of Asian economies such as China, Japan, South Korea and others have been fuelled by trade. While India's growth rate over the past decade has averaged about 6.4 percent, and while the value of exports to India's GDP has doubled from 13.7 percent to 23.5 percent over the last two decades, India still has a very low share of total global exports. In 2022, India's share of total merchandise trade was at 1.8 percent and of services exports at 4 percent. The growth rate in the merchandise and service sector would hence require a quantum increase,

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from the present CAGR (compound annual growth rate) of 4% and 8.5% in the merchandise and service sectors respectively to a CAGR of 12 and 18 percent. At the same time, logistic costs would need to be slashed to reduce costs and boost domestic competitiveness. As of now, the underlying issues in this sector are being addressed through the National Logistics Policy.[4]

For competitiveness in production, both the scale of production and the ease of doing business has to increase. Policy measures towards this end are already in vogue such as 'Make in India' initiative, 'Start up India' and the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme to strengthen the country's manufacturing infrastructure, and the innovation and entrepreneurship landscape. The manufacturing sector would also have to focus more on R&D, to move up in the global value chain, which would require additional funds. The private sector would thus have to be incentivised to promote R&D. With respect to ease of doing business, India's ranking has jumped from 142 in 2014 to 63 in 2023.[5] This is creditable, but India needs to get into the top twenty rankings for which targeted policy action remains the key. Other initiatives pertain to lowering import duty barriers and correcting duty anomalies. This would enable accessing of cheaper raw material and reduce overall manufacturing costs. Special focus would also be required for MSMEs, which contribute about 37 percent to India's manufacturing gross value output. The potential is there in India's manufacturing sector to produce quality products at a competitive rate for export, which, combined with the services sector can enable the achievement of the laid down target by 2030.

The Maritime Sector

India's maritime sector comprises Ports, Shipping, Shipbuilding and Ship repair and Inland Water Transport Systems, all of which come under the Ministry of Shipping. As of 31 December 2022, India's merchant ship fleet size was 1,520 ships with a total capacity of 20.54 million dwt. This accounts for a mere 1.3 percent of the total global dwt, underscoring the need for a robust indigenous shipping fleet.[6] India's national fleet carries only 9.7 percent of the country's EXIM trade and 59 percent of domestic coastal cargo (figures for FY 2019). For the rest, it is dependant on foreign carriers. This involves a heavy burden in terms of freight and insurance charges to overseas vendors, which is to the order of about USD 60 billion. India must, hence, build its own cargo ships and increase its fleet by a significant order of magnitude. Thus will, in the process, create a viable industrial base for the maritime sector.[7]

Alongside emphasis on trade and ramping up the manufacturing sector, India has to ensure the safety of its shipping and in conjunction with other powers, keeping the sea lanes of communication free, open and safe. On 4 May 2023, the Chief of Naval Staff Admiral R. Hari Kumar in his address at the Maritime Security Conference in Singapore, stated that the "most challenging aspect to maritime cooperation and collaboration is unilateralism".[8] The signalling by the Naval Chief was perhaps on predatory grey-zone operations, being carried out in the South China Sea and also in the Western Indian Ocean. Today, increased Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean is also a cause of concern. With the focus of power shifting to the Oceans, India will have to look at its naval capability

accordingly. While the Indian Navy has the capability to protect India's National Interests, the future demands a larger naval force, with adequate numbers of submarines, destroyers and aircraft carriers. All of these need to be built indigenously, for only then can we have full strategic autonomy. India now has its own indigenously built aircraft carrier, the INS Vikrant, to add on to INS Vikramaditya. But perhaps a third flattop is needed, to ensure that a carrier each is always available for the Western and Eastern Indian Ocean, with one carrier being on maintenance.

India's growth as an economic and military power will ride on the strength of its naval fleet. The construction of warships and submarines must hence form an important component of Indian naval strategy, both for fleet augmentation as well as for export to friendly countries.

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Towards a Stable and Sustainable Indian Ocean

Ranil Wickremesinghe*

The Australasian continent is unique in that it has borders with both the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Oceans. Perth played a crucial role in the history of Sri Lanka - Australia relations. During World War II, Royal Canadian Air Force, Catalina flying boats, traversed the expanse of the Indian Ocean, connecting Perth and Koggala air base in Ceylon—the only air link between the Indian subcontinent and Australia. Known as flights of the double sunrise, they operated a non-stop route up to 32 hours in radio silence, to ensure the success of a critical air route during World War II for the Allies.

The Japanese attacks in April 1942 on the Indian Ocean specially Ceylon was described by Churchill as the most dangerous moment of the war highlighting the importance of the Indian Ocean to the British Empire.

Historically, the Indian Ocean is multipolar and has resisted domination by a single power. This multipolarity is a reflection of the essence of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and its people. As Asia emerged from colonialism, the newly independent countries of Asia ie. Ceylon, India, Indonesia, Burma and Pakistan convened the Bandung Conference in 1955 to oppose colonialism in all its forms. The conference declaration to oppose big power rivalry in turn led to the Non Aligned Movement (NAM). Since then, the IOR has been influenced by the spirit of Bandung. It never became a part of the US Hub and Spoke system.

The past two decades has seen the emergence of diverse framings of the IOR and a flurry of diplomatic activity articulating various policy positions, tilts, and frameworks. What is clear is that no single, objective geopolitical construct has emerged, and we are left instead with a contested vision with multiple interpretations. The key frameworks that have emerged include in addition to IORA, the Indo-Pacific, the BRI, the QUAD, and the BRICS. There are also regional organisations including ASEAN, ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum), ACD (Asia Cooperation Dialogue), BIMSTEC, SAARC, GCC, Arab League, OIC, SADC, EAC and SCO that have been established. Additionally, we have the operational arrangements that deal with specific areas of cooperation including ReCAAP, IONS, the Djibouti Code of Conduct, IOTC, Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), MASE, four regional Information Fusion Centres (Singapore, India, Seychelles and Madagascar), and the CGPCS (Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia).

Along with these frameworks and groupings, we also see an increased militarisation of the Indian Ocean which is redefining power balances and

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alliances. In the maritime space we see a building up in naval capabilities in India, and with the USA, Australia, UAE, Saudi Arabia, and China all increasing their naval presence significantly. Therefore, balancing between the great power rivalry is becoming an increasingly more complex task. As a result, the space for manoeuvrability for littoral states is shrinking fast as this rivalry in the IOR, intensifies and spills over into decision making on political, economic and security issues. The proverbial question to choose one over the other is perennially hanging over us.

Secondly, the geopolitical developments have resulted in an increase in the strategic importance of the Western Indian Ocean that was not foreseen four years ago. This in turn is shifting the geopolitical emphasis towards the Indian Ocean. The Ukrainian war, and the consequent Western sanctions on Russia has resulted in the resource rich economy finding new markets in China and the Western Indian Ocean. For e.g. Russian crude oil is refined in the Gulf refineries. Dubai has replaced London as the financial centre for the oligarchs. Russia has developed a closer friendship with Iran, which is an important source of supply for drones. Russia is carrying on naval exercises with Indian Ocean countries, including Myanmar and South Africa. China itself has played an active role in healing the rift between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Iran and its allies have become important players in West Asia.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which now includes India, Pakistan and Iran as members, has the Western Indian Ocean as its outer limits. The ill-advised judgment of the US in supporting the Gaza war will diminish its influence in the region. The hostility of the countries forming the Islamic arch in the Indian Ocean will prevent any close rapprochement with the US for some time. The Russian, Chinese and Iranian strategies are successfully biting at the US hegemony thereby further weakening the US.

The Indian Ocean stability requires an early end to the Gaza war followed by, a) the establishment within 5 years of an Independent Palestine State and b) guarantees for the security of the state of Israel.

Thirdly, the recent attacks on commercial vessels by the Yemen-based Houthi rebels, is a challenge to the 'Freedom of Navigation'. We have to ensure access and mobility in the Suez Canal, Red Sea, Bab-el-Mandeb and the Gulf of Aden. In addition, we also face the threat of Somali Pirates, once again. The safety of undersea cables and critical infrastructure are also facing additional threats. The presence of drugs in the Indian Ocean and human smuggling have increased. IUU fishing still takes place. These threats present challenges to freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean and we need to refocus on the same. Sri Lanka offers to recommence the discussions on the freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean.

Fourth, is expanding connectivity. According to estimates there will be an eight-fold increase in the GDP of India and Indonesia by 2050. Similar increases are expected in some of the other countries in South and West Asia. This requires additional port capacities and new transport routes. The Suez Canal may not be sufficient. In this regard, India's two new connectivity initiatives are welcome. Firstly, the India (Mumbai) - Iran -Russia corridor and secondly the India (Mumbai) - Middle

East - Europe corridor. Similarly, there are connectivity initiatives taking place in the Bay of Bengal. Work has already commenced on the Chongqing-Kyaukphyu corridor giving access to Western China. Thailand is planning the Kra land bridge connecting the Gulf of Siam with the Bay of Bengal. India and Sri Lanka are commencing feasibility studies on land connectivity between the two countries making Sri Lanka a regional logistics hub with Colombo and Trincomalee ports available to South India.

The Indian Ocean Conference theme this year "Towards a more stable and sustainable Indian Ocean" highlights the two key areas which require our focus. What I have outlined before, dealt primarily with pursuing stability of the region. There is an equally serious, more immediate and existential threat that looms and that is the climate crisis.

Experts have revealed that the Indian Ocean is warming at a higher rate than the other oceans around the world. The levels of warming are estimated to be three times higher than in the Pacific Ocean and coastal areas across the IOR will experience continuous rise in sea levels and face severe coastal erosion. The Indian Ocean is also rising at a level of 3.7 millimetres annually and extreme sea disasters are inevitable. The island states of the IOR are vulnerable and have to be provided with adequate resources to mitigate the effects of climate change. Changes at sea also affect monsoon patterns and in turn impact on agriculture and food security across the Indian Ocean region. They also impact on the biodiversity and in turn on food and livelihood of people of the littoral states.

The Indian Ocean presents opportunities in terms of ecology. Not only is it our biggest sink for Carbon, but it also provides potential for mitigating the climate crisis, through offshore wind, solar, and wave energy. Through seaweed farming and mangrove cultivation we can increase the sequestration of Carbon. Sustainable exploitation of our Ocean's resources is critical for our survival, as the ocean provides for our future.

At COP 28, Sri Lanka proposed three key initiatives, (1) the Tropical Belt Initiative, including the Indian Ocean (2) The International Climate Change University and (3) the Climate Justice Forum. As the current Chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Sri Lanka is focusing on the interdependence between the Indian Ocean and climate change. The Climate Justice Forum aims to accelerate financing of losses and damages and includes debt justice as an essential component of the overall solution. Any proposals for mitigation and adaptation interventions must take into account the debt component faced by Climate-vulnerable and developing countries.

We are living in uncertain times. The stability we had taken for granted since the end of WWII and the Cold War is unravelling. Globalisation is being challenged as is multilateralism. The climate crisis is affecting prospects for trade and economic development around the world. It is impacting on food security, livelihoods, supply chains, biodiversity and maritime transportation. Either we can wait for global developments to dictate our fate or unite, so that we may chart our own course. Creating a safer ocean environment by building confidence and predictability among users and enhancing ocean situational awareness will be key to maintaining

peace and security in the Indian Ocean. The main platform that can undertake this important task is the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). Ensuring a peaceful and secure Indian Ocean would facilitate sustainable use of oceans for the economic and social benefit of coastal and littoral states.

An overarching architecture for the Indian Ocean that deals with critical issues is required. The basis for such a structure is already in existence including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the recently adopted BBNJ agreement in 2023 on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction or the High Seas Treaty.

A code of conduct on freedom of navigation and overflight and unimpeded commerce and similar guiding principles on dealing with the climate crisis and the sustainable use of the Indian Ocean are a necessity. Only the leaders of the Indian Ocean countries can ensure that these measures are translated to the creation of an overarching regional architecture for the Indian Ocean region. Therefore, the responsibility lies with us.

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Indian Ocean Region: Challenges and Solutions

S. Jaishankar*

The theme of the 7th Indian Ocean Conference is 'Towards a Stable and Sustainable Indian Ocean'. These two adjectives are laden with much meaning in such turbulent times. As we gaze at the Indian Ocean, the challenges besetting the world are on full display there. At one extremity, we see conflict, threats to maritime traffic, piracy and terrorism. At the other, there are challenges to international law, concerns about freedom of navigation and overflights, and of safeguarding of sovereignty and of independence. Any disregard for arduously negotiated regimes like UNCLOS 1982 is naturally disturbing. In between, a range of trans-national and non-traditional threats present themselves, largely visible in a spectrum of interconnected illegal activities. Instability also increases when long-standing agreements are no longer observed, with no credible justification to justify a change of stance. All of them, separately and together, make it imperative that there be greater consultation and cooperation, among the states of the Indian Ocean.

Our concerns today also extend to grey areas of various kinds. Some may emanate from climate change and natural disasters. Disruptive events are occurring with greater frequency and deeper impact, forcing us all to factor them into our calculus of resilience. There are also the consequences of distant happenings, such as the fuel, food and fertiliser crises that many of us have experienced. But we should be equally conscious that the 'normal' can be manipulated, leading to unsustainable debt, opaque lending practices, unviable projects and injudicious choices. Similarly, there are the complexities of dual-purpose agendas that mask visibility and lower our guard. Indeed, such activities when combined with the advancement of connectivity with strategic intent, has emerged as a growing anxiety for Indian Ocean states. Well before we come to policy responses, it is necessary to develop awareness and proper understanding.

To these gradually emerging developments, there are now also the challenges that are structurally inherent in the current form of globalisation. Over-concentrations of manufacturing and technology are creating both supply-side risks, as well as the possibility of leveraging. The experiences which the world underwent during the Covid pandemic has powerful lessons that we ignore only at our own peril. The need of the day is to disperse production across more geographies and build reliable and resilient supply-chains. The digital era and emergence of artificial intelligence has, in parallel, put a premium on trust and transparency. Our very concept of security has undergone a metamorphosis in a volatile and uncertain existence. As a result, the nations of the Indian Ocean today need to reflect on whether they should pursue more collective

self-reliance, or remain as vulnerable as in the past. Our sustainable future lies in concentrating on the drivers of the future: digital, electric mobility, green hydrogen and green shipping, to cite a few.

When it comes to solutions, let us note that the Indian Ocean has a set of mechanisms that have evolved, each at their own pace. They include the Indian Ocean Rim Association, the Indian Ocean Commission, the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, the Colombo Security Conclave etc. As the concept of Indo-Pacific took root, initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework and the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness Initiative emerged, amongst others. Many of us present here today are members of some of them or all of them. Because the challenges and responsibilities are so complex and multi-dimensional, it is incumbent on us to address them at various levels. While infusing more energy into the Indian Ocean centric bodies, we also need to simultaneously work on the larger Indo-Pacific canvas and the narrower sub-regional ones. At the end of the day, they all reinforce each other.

Speaking for India, let me underline that in the last decade, we have been very open and engaging in our outlook. As a result, since 2014, India has joined or initiated 36 plurilateral groups in different domains. Many of them have a direct relevance to the future of the Indian Ocean. Others have a domain relevance that contribute to the well-being and security of the maritime spaces and its littoral territories. There are global endeavours which naturally have a regional application as well. Some have strengthened our bilateral partnership with Australia and the Pacific Islands. As regards

connectivity, building on the remarks earlier today by Minister Vivian earlier, let me highlight the need for lateral land-based connectivity across the Indian Ocean region. These are essential to supplement and complement the maritime flows. That is why the IMEC Corridor to India's West and the Trilateral Highway to India's East are so significant. Together, they can be veritable changers connecting the Pacific to the Atlantic. Allow me to now share some thoughts in regard to other priorities.

We see the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) fostering cooperation and sustainable development. It contributes to enhancing regional security by addressing maritime safety, piracy, and environmental sustainability. Apart from being the highest contributor to the IORA Special Fund, we have encouraged the formulation of IORA's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and restructuring the Chair of Indian Ocean Studies (CIOS). Capacity building is a priority here and the Indian Navy conducts training and exercises to counter IUU fishing and piracy. Assistance to Somalia and Yemen have been notable in this regard. As the Vice Chair and the upcoming Chair for the term 2025-27, our focus is on structural and institutional strengthening of the IORA in order to realize its full potential.

I also draw your attention to the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), proposed by India in 2019. It is an open, non-treaty based global initiative that seeks to manage, conserve, sustain, and secure the maritime domain. In the IPOI, Australia's leadership on Maritime Ecology, the United Kingdom's on maritime security, and the co-leadership of France and Indonesia on the Maritime

Resources pillars have helped to make a beginning. Over the past year, Italy has joined Singapore in leading the Science and Technology pillar, while Germany took the helm in Capacity Building and Resource Sharing. The United States, in partnership with Japan, now co-leads the Trade, Connectivity, and Maritime Transport pillar, and India leading the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management pillar and co-leading on Maritime Security, has added to the realisation of this initiative. Progress on IPOI reflects a strengthening bond among nations that share a common desire to sustain the two oceans through practical, project-based cooperation. Looking forward, the IPOI aims to launch new projects and initiatives while establishing greater synergy with IORA.

Let me also flag the growth of the BIMSTEC, an important regional forum covering the Bay of Bengal. For India, it is a convergence of our "Neighbourhood First" policy, or "Act East" outlook and the Indian Ocean interests. India is the lead country for the Security pillar of BIMSTEC, which covers counter-terrorism and transnational crime, disaster management and energy security. We host the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate near Delhi and efforts are underway to set up a BIMSTEC Energy Centre near Bengaluru. We have been organizing events and activities in areas ranging from agriculture, disaster management, space and remote sensing to transnational crimes, trade and investment. We also offer research and higher education scholarships, while promoting common programmes. Infusing more resources and more energy into this grouping will certainly give it a greater role in the times ahead.

A notable development for the region has been the emergence and the consolidation of the Quad grouping. Its upgradation to the Summit level is a message in itself. Today, the Quad addresses maritime security, safety, HADR, environment protection, connectivity, strategic technologies, supply chain resilience, health, education and cyber security, amongst others. The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework and the Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness are larger endeavours that have emerged from the deliberations of the Quad. The Quad is today a forum for global good that is particularly active in regard to the global commons. Its deepening is in the interest not only of its members but of the larger region which draws benefit from its activities. Let me underline that it supports the larger architecture in this part of the world that has been painstakingly built up over so many years by ASEAN processes. Those who mischievously suggest that Quad questions the centrality of the ASEAN are playing their own. I am confident that ASEAN will see through it.

It is natural that I speak here about India's growing relations with the Pacific Islands. In the last decade, they have evolved steadily and the May 2023 Summit in Port Moresby has laid out some ambitious goals. India is committed to building a hospital and an oceanic research centre in Fiji, as well as a cyber security hub and space application centre in Papua New Guinea. With all other members, we will be engaging on education, solarisation, desalination, dialysis facilities, artificial limbs, sea ambulances and SME development. This is in tune with our larger outlook vis a vis the Global South.

India-Australia relations is truly an increasingly consequential relationship. We are today officially Comprehensive Strategic partners, Quad members and share trilaterals with France and Indonesia. Our bilateral architecture caters to regular meetings of Foreign, Defense, Trade, Power, Education and Skill Ministers. We do 2+2 meetings, we conduct Exercise Malabar amongst many others, we collaborate on a Maritime Fusion Center and we reciprocally host deployments. The Indian community in Australia has expanded significantly, and the ECTA has visibly boosted our trade. Every Australian Prime Minister in the last decade has met his Indian counterpart, a far cry from the past. The current ones have actually met seven times. My conversations with Foreign Minister Penny Wong now go well beyond our bilateral ties and bring out the many similarities of our approach to world affairs. In short, we have a strong, comfortable and deepening relationship. A foreign policy survey in India released just two days ago puts Australia among our top 3 partners in terms of reliability. But to all of you who are gathered here, I want to emphasize that these ties are and will be a force for regional and global good.

The Indian Ocean, more than any other region, bears witness to India's greater contribution, responsibilities and interests. From a new Indian Institute of Technology campus in Zanzibar to Solar Mamas in the Pacific, the world sees a more empathetic, efficient and reliable India. We espoused the cause of the Global South and Small Island Developing States during our G20 Presidency. We similarly took forward the message of reformed multilateralism and climate justice. Our Indian Ocean region may be extraordinarily diverse and immensely complicated. But its inherent unity, so deeply rooted in our traditions and cultures, are today best advanced by more intense cooperation among member states.

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Building an Indian Ocean Community

Penny Wong*

I acknowledge the Whadjuk Noongar people as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters on which we meet, and pay my respects to Elders, past and present. Noongar people have managed and cared for the land, rivers and seas that connect Australia to the Indian Ocean for thousands of years and long before Europeans arrived here in the 1600s, indigenous Australians were trading tools and exchanging culture with neighbours across seas – as far back as 4,000 years ago.

Australia today remains home to the oldest continuous culture on the planet, and is now also home to people from more than 300 ancestries. A nation whose people share common ground with so many of the world's peoples – including peoples from around this ocean we face from here in Perth, our Indian Ocean capital. When we look west, Australians see the Indian Ocean. And we see its peoples in our own reflection.

In more than 30,000 Australians that hail from Mauritius, the 50,000 Australians from East Africa, our diverse communities from across South Asia and the nearly one million Australians of Indian ancestry. And indeed, some Australians who made their journey from East Africa trace their heritage back to migration from India at the turn of the last century.

With all of you, Australia is a proud custodian of the oceans. We share the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean – almost one half of the earth's surface. We take this responsibility seriously and we know you do too. Not least, the island nations of the Indian Ocean – who are custodians of more water than land – small islands, with immense seas. We are bound not just by shared geography but by the shared destiny of our interests. How we prosper will be determined by how we work together to achieve those shared interests.

At the outset I want to acknowledge that we gather on the eve of the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale illegal and immoral invasion of Ukraine. And the devastating conflict in the Middle East continues, with 400,000 Palestinians in Gaza starving, a million at risk of starvation, and 1.7 million people in Gaza internally displaced, while more than 130 hostages are still being held by Hamas. The risk of regional escalation remains great. The terrible toll of these conflicts underlines the importance of countries like ours working together to maintain peace in our region.

There is much talk of the Indo-Pacific, but give more emphasis to the second half of that compound term. The fact is that the same unprecedented threats that are faced on the Pacific Ocean side of the region are also faced on the Indian Ocean side. The prosperity, peace, and resilience we seek are being seriously challenged.

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*Hon Penny Wong is the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Government of Australia.

Food and energy are increasingly in short supply. More people are displaced. More conflict risks and costs lives.

The continuing deterioration of the political, humanitarian and security situation in Myanmar not only affects its people profoundly, but also regional security. Elsewhere, flare-ups and tensions over disputed areas heighten the risk of escalation to conflict. Transnational crime and terrorism continue to challenge the security and economic prosperity of this region.

The pervasive challenge of irregular migration and people smuggling are felt deeply by many of you, and by us in Australia – as we discuss at the Bali Process, the forum we co-host with Indonesia. The scourge of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing threatens the Blue Economy, and the livelihoods and stability that rely upon it.

The multilateral system is falling short of the commitments we have all agreed to. And of course, the climate is changing faster than our combined efforts to stop it. Many of our communities have been overwhelmed by floods and fires. In just the past year, 33 million people in Pakistan and seven million in Bangladesh have been displaced by floods. Africa has faced protracted droughts and cyclones. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 2021 warned that the Indian Ocean has warmed faster than any other waters since the 1950s.

These warmer temperatures, along with other climate impacts, are predicted to induce declines in fish catches across the ocean, hurting nations that have a high dependency on fisheries and lack options to adapt to climate shocks. Ocean warming, acidification and coral bleaching are affecting the Maldives, and decreasing fish catches in Indonesia, the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf and the Bay of Bengal. Just as the threat of warmer waters is felt in profound ways for low-lying Pacific atoll nations like Tuvalu, it is felt for Indian Ocean nations like Seychelles – which is only a few metres above sea level.

Mauritius has estimated that half the island's beaches will be eroded in the next fifty years. The recent oil spill there and the cargo ship fire in Sri Lanka are powerful reminders of the vulnerability of these island ecosystems. Preserving our region demands slowing the destructive march of climate change.

I'm pleased to announce that Australia is launching a Marine and Coastal Resilience Hub under India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative. The Hub will drive deeper engagement and advance scientific research among Indo-Pacific partners on marine ecology, the threats of climate change and marine pollution – issues that matter deeply to the sustainability of our shared Indian Ocean.

The IORA Blue Carbon Hub, led by our national science agency CSIRO here in Perth, is also building capacity and empowering IORA members to protect and restore blue carbon ecosystems throughout the Indian Ocean.

Economic, climate and food insecurity are exacerbating humanitarian crises and disasters in the region. Australia will continue to provide disaster preparedness and development assistance for healthcare, economic recovery and humanitarian support to Indian Ocean countries. Last financial year, Australia provided over USD 330 million in development assistance and over USD 100 million in humanitarian support to South Asia alone. Yet

we also face other, growing threats to our security and sovereignty. Throughout history we have seen small countries, at vast distances from major powers, bear the brunt of a race for dominance. The countries gathered here are no strangers to strategic competition – and you are also no strangers to its costs.

As expanding military powers take a greater interest in our region, we each need to sharpen our focus, on what our interests are, and how to work together to uphold them. Building an Indian Ocean community, with habits of cooperation and of collaboration. Embracing our diversity as a strength in our partnership. We need to forge our regional architecture and shape a regional identity.

Each of us has an interest in preserving the sovereign character of our own nations, and the open, inclusive and rules-based character of our region. Our shared focus must be on what we need to do so we can make our own choices, according to our own laws and values, and pursue our own prosperity, respecting but not deferring to others. Working in an open and transparent way that instills confidence in the choices that are offered – choices that are credible, genuine and enduring. The most serious scenario we must confront is the risk of strategic competition escalating into conflict.

We face rising tensions across potential flashpoints in the region – from the Taiwan Strait to the Malacca Strait, with its critical connection to the Andaman Sea and Bay of Bengal. Disputes persist about land and maritime borders. The Indian Ocean already hosts more than a third of the world's bulk cargo traffic and two-thirds of global oil shipments. Any slowdown or interruption, from piracy, disputes or disruptions, would have costly consequences around the world, as has been all too apparent recently in the Red Sea.

Countries of the Indo-Pacific face China's rapid military build-up, without the transparency and reassurance that the region looks for from great powers. But with an increasing level of commercial and military passage through the Indian Ocean comes a greater need for transparency and reassurance – to guard against the risks of miscalculation and accidents we see in other vital international waterways. The former Maldives' Minister of State, Ahmed Khaleel, has observed that, "The Indian Ocean may become a key threat for strategic competition between major rival powers. But our hope is that the Indian Ocean will not witness a security dilemma in which activities by larger outside powers to enhance their own security interests create insecurity for others in the region."

And our security in the region is challenged by actions that fall far short of conflict. Throughout the Indo-Pacific, there is an urgent need to address disinformation, interference, opaque lending practices and coercive trade measures. To manage such risks in a world where even research vessels have the potential to be tools for strategic goals. In some cases, secrecy is privileged over transparency, and principles and practices of openness overlooked or abandoned.

Fragility and poor governance are stretching scarce government resources and leading to worse outcomes for vulnerable populations. At the same time, international rules and norms are being reshaped, with some rights or goals abandoned in pursuit of others. This all encroaches on the ability

of countries to act in pursuit of their interests. Without the freedom to act, within the bounds of agreed rules, we are constrained in our ability to maintain the balance of power we need for a prosperous and stable region. Whether we are discussing the risk of these encroachments, or the risk of catastrophic conflict, our interests remain clear.

A region that is peaceful and predictable, that is governed by accepted rules and norms, where all of us can cooperate, trade and thrive. Where a larger country does not determine the fate of a smaller country. Where each country can pursue its own aspirations. Where no country dominates, and no country is dominated. Rather than a closed, hierarchical region, we want a region characterised by openness and transparency. A region that prioritises:

- the resilience and autonomy of regional countries;
- the maintenance of regional peace and stability; and
- adherence to international law and agreed rules and norms, where all countries' sovereignty is respected.

This vision for our region is grounded in sovereignty.

Sovereignty, at a fundamental level, is about being able to make your own decisions, and shape your own future. Sovereignty might be exercised alone but it is best assured when we are working together. Because none of us can achieve a region with the attributes I am describing by ourselves.

We can only achieve this region if we all work together and all contribute to strategic balance. Australia is determined to make our contribution to the strategic balance of our region. We are investing in our own national power and applying all the tools of statecraft at our disposal. We are working with partners to help increase resilience and resistance to coercion. We are investing in our diplomacy, working to build coalitions, foster assurance, reduce tensions, avert crisis, prevent and help resolve disputes. And we are investing in a capable military, defence industry and partnerships, including through AUKUS, to contribute in our role as a security partner for the region. Deterrence and reassurance are both required to reduce the risk of conflict – by demonstrating the high costs should conflict occur alongside the advantages to all if it does not.

Transparency is at the centre of our approach – setting standards for ourselves and expecting those standards are emulated by others. But without credible military capability, the efficacy of diplomacy is invariably diminished. And without ever more active diplomacy, the risk of military capabilities being called into service is greater. So Australia has opened new posts at Bengaluru, Kolkata and Malé.

We are strengthening our existing formal alliances with the United States and New Zealand, and growing other partnerships – partnerships that build confidence and create choices. Australia is building our trilateral initiatives, with India and Indonesia, and India and France, to coordinate on our shared interests in the Indian Ocean. We are deepening our economic and security partnerships with Japan and India, as well as the Republic of Korea, United Kingdom, France and the countries of Southeast Asia. And we are leveraging those partnerships for positive impact in the region – the Quad's response to regional priorities is a prime

example, as is donor coordination in the Pacific, such as through the Partners for the Blue Pacific.

We are stabilising our relationship with China, without compromising on our interests or national security, recognising that we can't manage our differences or take forward our interests without dialogue. We are deepening our historical commitment to multilateralism. We demonstrate our respect for each other by upholding the same rules. This is the approach Australia has taken in relation to the International Court of Justice's ruling on provisional measures for Israel.

In a joint statement with New Zealand last week, we expressed our respect for the independence of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the critical role it plays in upholding international law and the rules-based order. We underlined that decisions of the ICJ are binding on the parties to the case, and our shared expectation is that Israel act in accordance with the ICJ's ruling, including to enable the provision of basic services and humanitarian assistance. Here in our region, we know the less we all operate by the same rules, the less unified we are, the more likely it is that vulnerabilities will be exploited.

Australia was proud to play a leading role, with many of you, in the negotiation of the High Seas Treaty and the Global Biodiversity Treaty. It was our people, working side by side, that created stronger protections for our oceans and ensured the interests and contributions of indigenous peoples and local communities are recognised. We believe in the importance of regional institutions, including the architecture that binds the region from ocean to ocean – ASEAN, the Pacific Islands Forum and the Indian Ocean Rim Association. Our commitment to these bodies is not new. Australia was the first non-member to establish formal relations with ASEAN – ASEAN's first dialogue partner. And we are founding members of both the Pacific Islands Forum and the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

Our collective efforts and resources have aimed to respond to the region's needs and priorities. That is why Australia is, with our friends from India, hosting this conference today. And this is why Australia works to maintain the conditions for peace through our diplomacy - while playing our part in transparent, collective deterrence of aggression.

Across our region, we see military power is expanding, but measures to constrain military conflict are not – and there are few concrete mechanisms for averting it. We seek to change the calculus for any potential aggressor, so that no state concludes that the benefits of conflict outweigh the risks. Australia has a long record of promoting peace, in our region and beyond. Including our work in 1971 as a member of the United Nations Ad Hoc Committee, seeking to establish the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace. And today we seek new measures for conflict prevention that reinforce the region's existing economic and security architecture.

It is gratifying to be among so many other countries who share this goal, and who bring so much history and experience of peace building and conflict resolution to the table. The Bay of Bengal Arbitrations delimiting maritime boundaries were one example where states peacefully resolved overlapping, long-standing and sensitive claims under UNCLOS.

We have learned so much from the African Union's leadership, and the powerful contribution of African countries to peace building throughout history. All around the world, we must lessen the risk of misunderstanding and miscalculation, and prevent catastrophic conflict. All of us have a role in deploying our collective statecraft, our influence, our networks and our capabilities towards this goal. This is the challenge that peace building must meet today.

Our partnership with India, the largest economy of this region, is central to our efforts to build a peaceful, safe and prosperous Indian Ocean. The example India sets as a regional leader is essential to our efforts to uphold sovereignty and the rules. India and Australia, as partners and friends, are working to provide practical options in the region to help boost sovereign capability in the maritime domain.

We are hosting Law of the Sea workshops to build capacity in the Indian Ocean region on UNCLOS, maritime domain awareness and maritime law enforcement. We will initiate a Maritime Leadership Program, which will help to build the skills, leadership and confidence of the region's senior operational leaders. And Australia will launch a Civil Maritime Security Postgraduate program, bringing together emerging policy leaders to deepen their expertise in international maritime law and security. And Australia looks forward to working closely with India to co-lead IORA's Maritime Safety and Security working group over the next two years.

Building capacity and sovereignty in the maritime domain is central to the development of the blue economy, from which so much of the region's prosperity stems. Our trade and tourism links are also key enablers of economic resilience. We are invested in your success, just as you are invested in ours. Australia is partnering with the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation to initiate a bankable pipeline of projects to improve connectivity in South Asia. This includes regional energy integration across Bhutan, Nepal, India and Bangladesh. We're also partnering with Sri Lanka on management of its air assets and design work for two ports in Bangladesh.

All our efforts aim to help countries build their own resilience and sovereignty. To ensure countries can protect our great oceans. To ensure countries aren't held back by unsustainable debt. Australia will always pursue a world where differences and disputes are settled through institutions, agreed rules and norms, and not by force or coercion. We will always remain a principled Indian Ocean power and a reliable Indian Ocean partner. Because this region is our region, and together, we get to determine its character and we get to decide its future.

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Strategic Significance and Sustainability

Vivian Balakrishnan*

What is the significance of the Indian Ocean, and its relation to the Himalayas? It is not something which you link immediately—the Indian Ocean, and the Himalayas. But in fact, the story begins there. For almost all of recorded history, the Himalayas, 8,000 meters high, and the dense jungles of Myanmar, served as a major, significant barrier - though not completely impermeable - between South Asia and East Asia, and even to some extent, Central Asia. Because of that, it was the Indian Ocean which historically has been the conduit for culture, language, religion, trade, and even in more recent centuries, as the vector for colonisation. In a way, because of that barrier, the Indian Ocean achieved greater salience.

We know that there are 26 littoral states in the Indian Ocean, so that question if asked is easy to answer. But if asked, which landlocked countries are dependent on the Indian Ocean, the answer is more nuanced, for it depends on what is meant by 'dependant'. As an example, for Nepal, the largest trading partner is India, but the second largest, or an increasing partner, is China. So how do Chinese goods reach a landlocked nation, up in the Himalayas? The answer – the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean thus has great historical, linguistic, cultural and economic significance.

The second sub-point is to appreciate that there are choke points in the Indian Ocean. If one has to get to East Asia, and assuming the travel is not over the Himalayas, we have basically two alternatives. One, come through the Strait of Malacca, for which the pivot point is Singapore. The alternative is the Sunda Strait between Java and Sumatra. When the Suez Canal is open, the shortest route between Europe and China and Japan becomes the Strait of Malacca because that avoids going all the way around the Cape of Good Hope.

The words 'choke points' are mentioned because of what is happening in the Red Sea, with the Houthis firing missiles on merchant ships. This is a stark reminder that choke points exist and continue to be salient for the Indian Ocean. If the conflagration in the Middle East expands, it is not just shipping through the Red Sea which is affected, but also the Strait of Hormuz. The significance is that about 70 to 80 percent of oil traverses the Indian Ocean; 50 to 60 percent of container traffic also traverses the Indian Ocean. Any outright conflict, or even the threat of conflict, immediately raises insurance premiums. In the case where you have to divert and avoid the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, there is an additional 4,000 miles and 12 extra sailing days to sail around Africa. This immediately means economic impact.

Singapore is a small trading nation. Last year,

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we had a record year for our port, where we dealt with 39 million TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) of containers. Those in the shipping industry know that this is a very big number. When Singapore says maritime shipping is important, it is not a debating or political point but is our very lifeblood. That is why Singapore has always been a very strong proponent for the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Now, why does this have strategic significance?

The reason is that the moment a ship leaves Perth, or Colombo, or Mumbai, or Singapore, that ship does not have to seek permission from anyone or pay rental to anyone to decide where it is going to call, wherever it is in the world. That is the legal and economic significance of freedom of navigation. Even if you have to traverse territorial seas, or straits used for international navigation, you assert the right of innocent passage, you get to go through, you pay no one, you seek no permissions. Now, this is critical, even today, for economic lifeblood. There is another factoid which is worth remembering: take a moderately large ship that traverses the Suez Canal today. In fact, the largest ship that traverses the Suez Canal today takes 24,000 TEUs. But let us just settle for about 18,000 TEUs, which is a more average number. If one were to unload all those containers onto a train, the trick question is, how long does a train need to be, to carry all the containers off one ship? The answer: more than 100 kilometres, which is clearly impractical. Again, this emphasises the importance of maritime shipping, and that, even in this day and age, there is no substitute for maritime shipping. Therefore, maintaining the right of freedom of navigation as a right, not by grace of the littoral state, remains absolutely essential. We believe that this right needs to be affirmed, reaffirmed, and we need to hang on to this. For all of us here from littoral states and landlocked states that depend on maritime shipping, this is something which is non-negotiable.

Let me now move on to the second theme, on sustainability. It is a sobering statistic that in August 2023, the average sea surface temperature reached a new record of 21 degrees centigrade. With specific reference to the Indian Ocean, 2023 was also a record year for the average sea surface temperature. If you visit Maldives, you can see with your own eyes, coral bleaching. So, there is no question that this is a clear and present danger.

On our part, in Singapore, there are a couple of things which we have done at the international stage. Apart from participating in the negotiations that led up to the Paris Agreement and the subsequent COP meetings, last year we co-sponsored the resolution put forward by Vanuatu seeking an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ), to lay out the national obligations on protecting Earth's climate and the legal consequences for failing to do so. There are many developed countries that would be very nervous of this resolution, and more importantly, if and when the ICJ comes up with a hearing. Nevertheless, we felt that this was important. This is important for low-lying island states like Singapore and many of the Pacific Island, where it is an existential issue, which goes beyond coral bleaching. It even goes to the point where many states are at real risk, not just of flooding, but of complete submersion. Last year, we also participated in the successful conclusion of the

BBNJ (**B**iodiversity of Areas **B**eyond **N**ational **J**urisdiction) Treaty. This is the Treaty on the sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. It is a landmark achievement, and we are very glad that it was a Singaporean Ambassador for the Oceans and the Law of the Sea, Ms Rena Lee, who presided over the successful negotiations. It will provide a critical boost for global efforts to protect the marine environment.

Singapore is also seeking partners for collaboration on green shipping corridors. This allows us to contribute to developing standards, best practices and the technology needed to support decarbonisation, digitalisation, and sustainable growth of the maritime industry. Specifically in the Indian Ocean, Singapore is contributing to what has been called the Silk Alliance initiative. This is an initiative that aims to enable zero-emission shipping across the Indian and Pacific Oceans via green corridor clusters, including focusing on a baseline fleet that predominantly bunkers, and we hope will bunker in Singapore as well. We believe that we need to find collective solutions that bring everyone on board, and leave no one behind to achieve a sustainable Indian Ocean.

In conclusion, since the IOC was launched in 2016, we have been able to keep attention focused on maintaining the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace, of development, and increasingly, also focus attention not just on the security aspects, but on the sustainable aspects. I think achieving peace and stability in the Indian Ocean has become even more salient, not less. Maintaining a rules-based global order, negotiating international treaties, complying with those terms, seeking peaceful resolution of disputes and preparing for a sustainable future are thus critical.

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Organic link between the Himalayas and the Indian Ocean

Narayan Prakash Saud*

The Indian Ocean today is more than just geography. It embodies geopolitical, geo-strategic and geo-economic significance. Most significantly, it is a civilisational hub. The Indian Ocean region, connecting the high Himalayas to the low seas, has been perceived as a cradle of globalisation and today it has emerged as the epicentre of economic and technological advancement.

Today, the ocean is facing both traditional and non-traditional security challenges. Marine terrorism, piracy, illicit trafficking of drugs and weapons, human trafficking, illegal migration, and interruption in freedom of navigation pose serious and immediate challenges, which would require concerted and collaborative efforts to address.

The Indian Ocean is also warming at a faster rate than the other oceans due to increased anthropogenic activities, leading to a sea level rise and an increase in frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. Acidification is threatening its ecosystem and pollution from land is creating coastal dead zones. In this scenario, it would be just a symphony of dreams to imagine a healthy region without a healthy Indian Ocean. Sustainable use of its resources for economic growth while preserving the health of the ecosystem is today's exigency and a stable and sustainable Indian Ocean is reliant upon regional cooperation and collaboration.

The Indian Ocean has already become world's prominent trade seaway and increasingly becoming the nerve centre of global trade and commerce. It is lifelime for Nepal in reaching the international market. The stability and sustainability of Indian Ocean region is therefore important for Nepal. Nepal's developmental aspiration is dependent upon the Indian Ocean, while the health of the Indian Ocean also relies upon the ecosystem and climatic condition of Himalaya region. Strengthening the blue economy is dependent upon nurturing the mountain economy and vice versa.

The ocean and mountain issues, therefore, should be dealt with in an integrated and holistic manner with full recognition of their organic interconnectedness. The interaction between the Himalayas and Indian Ocean contributes to the unique climatic condition in South Asia. There is an organic link between the Himalayas and the ocean. The monsoon rains, influenced by the ocean's temperature, are affecting agriculture and water resources. The rivers, originating from the Himalayas, flow into the Indian Ocean, forming diverse ecosystems. The Himalayas serve global service to living beings. In essence, Himalayan ecology and Indian Ocean ecology are contingent upon each other.

Any policy injected should therefore have the capacity to boost the immense system of both regions. Our failure to care for both the ocean and

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Note: *This article is based on the Text of the Speech delivered by Mr. Narayan Prakash Saud, Foreign Minister of Nepal, at the 7th Indian Ocean Conference 2024 in Perth, Australia.*

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mountain will have ripple effect in people and planet. We must protect the ocean and mountains from the impact of climate change. Nepal's hydropower potential, if fully utilised, can contribute towards the decarbonisation of the country and the region.

Nepal is aiming to graduate from the status of LDC by 2026, achieve the goals and targets of sustainable development goals, and become a middle-income country by 2030. Landlocked developing countries need the international and regional support to enhance their capacity for reaping the benefit of the ocean, including in the utilisation of the marine resources under the high seas. Realising the already made commitments in an effective manner is crucial for enabling them. In this regard, Nepal has committed to achieving net zero greenhouse gas emission by 2045, five years earlier than called for in the Paris Agreement to limit the global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Nepal recognises the importance of the Indian Ocean as the global public good. The importance of conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction must be recognised for the common benefit of humankind. A stable and sustainable ocean and mountain is vital for our shared future. Nepal remains committed to engaging constructively in building the resilient Indian Ocean region.

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Strengthening Cooperation at the Operational Level in Indian Ocean

Maneesh Gobin*

How to ensure peace and stability in the Indian Ocean? This is a question of principle. There is no peace and stability without a rule based international order. It's basically a question of the rule of law. It's the same domestically. Without rule of law, we will have no law and order, no peace and no stability. It's the same on the international plane. We need to stick to international law and work with institutions such as the Indian Ocean Commission and the IORA to ensure peace and stability.

Australia and New Zealand had issued last week a joint statement underlining the independence of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the pronouncement recently on the case concerning Israel. And in the joint statement, Australia and New Zealand highlighted the crucial role that the ICJ plays in maintaining and ensuring the international rule-based order. I join in this statement to underline the importance of this rule based international order and the importance of institutions like the ICJ. So, I also call for maintaining the independence of institutions like the ICJ, the rule-based order, and respect for the pronouncements of institutions like the ICJ.

The second thing I call for is to ensure that there is respect for international law. There should not be double standards. You cannot call for the application of one pronouncement of the ICJ and ignore another pronouncement of that very same institution. You cannot apply a particular rule in one part of the world and delay the application of that very same rule in another part of the world. This does not bring stability. We need uniform application of the rule of law to ensure long term peace and stability.

My final remarks concern the operational level of cooperation. We have a lot of consultation and cooperation amongst ourselves, on the question of application of rule based international order. But we also should strengthen cooperation at the operational level on the sharing of information and intelligence. As an example, with respect to the Western Indian Ocean region, to ensure maritime safety security, thanks to the cooperation with the IOC and development partners, particularly the European Union and the United States, we have set up two regional centres, one in the Seychelles and one in Madagascar. In Seychelles, it is called the RCOC, Regional Coordination Operations Centre and in Madagascar, it is called the Fusion Centre. In these centre, operational level information on maritime traffic is shared. This enables tracking of illegal activity in the Indian Ocean and ensures operational level peace and stability.

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Initiatives like the Djibouti code of conduct, is about the sharing of information at operational level, and such initiatives need to be enhanced to ensure peace and stability. As maritime trade increases, we will unfortunately also see increase in illegal activities, whether it's piracy, drug trafficking or other forms of illicit activities. In order to combat these illicit activities and ensure peace and stability, we will need to enhance cooperation between our operational forces, between countries. And that can only happen with the sharing of information and the participation of the big naval powers. Small states like Mauritius or the Indian Ocean islands do not have this operational capability. We can share the information and the intelligence, but on the operational level, we will need the participation of the big naval powers. It is happening in the Western Indian Ocean. We should enhance cooperation, broaden it for the whole of the Indian Ocean.

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Sustainable Management of the Marine Resources in Indian Ocean

Rafaravavitafika Rasata*

We are all aware of the vulnerabilities of our Indian Ocean. We have been tackling some crucial issues and trying to find solutions to the challenges the littoral countries face, such as climate change, energy, sustainability, resilience, security and stability in the region. Another key issue to be addressed is safeguarding the health of our shared ocean resources. As a representative of the island state of Madagascar, I would go straight to what Madagascar is expecting for a blue future. The Madagascar government is confident that blue economy is one of the pillars of the country's development. With its 1,400,000 km² exclusive economic zone, 150,000 hectares of lakes, as well as its 40 major rivers and streams, which total more than 9000-kilometres, blue economy offers an estimated potential USD 330 million that has to be harnessed to contribute to the country's economic growth. So, in order to take full advantage of this potential, the government adopted in 2023, the National Strategy on Blue Economy, based on a cross sectoral, integrated approach as well as the National Blue Economy Investment Plan.

The main objective is to promote sustainable management of the marine resources and to emphasise coordination between the various sectors, stakeholders, national as well as international partners, in order to maximise economic benefits while preserving the integrity of the marine ecosystems. At present, there are various ongoing formats and initiatives set up by regional organisations regarding the Indian Ocean. There are, for instance, the SADC Fisheries Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Coordination Centre, and the Indian Ocean Commission Regional Fisheries Surveillance Plan, to which Madagascar contributes, so as to monitor its 5603 km coastline and to combat one of the scourges plaguing the country — illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. All those initiatives are on the right track, but it is critical to extend them and to ensure their effective enactment, since we ought to maintain our shared ocean resources and ecosystem health and to encourage sustainable use of conservation areas. But the reason we are here is our willingness to unite, to pool our resources and help each other in relevant priority areas that we already have defined or will be defining through joint initiatives, innovative solutions involving institutions, experts and investors.

As for Madagascar, priorities are given to the development of the offshore fishing inland and marine aquaculture, blue tourism, maritime and

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Note: *This article is based on the Text of the Speech delivered by Ms. Rafaravavitafika Rasata, Foreign Minister of Madagascar, at the 7th Indian Ocean Conference 2024 in Perth, Australia.*

river transport, port infrastructures and port handling, deepwater mining and renewable energies linked to water. Madagascar is ready, committed with the means at its disposal and the expertise it has, to do its bit and give it its all. It is crucial to establish cooperation amongst all Indian Ocean countries, to safeguard our common resources. Together we can develop mindful technologies, share useful experiences, spur economic growth and secure a peaceful Indian Ocean to promote resilience and sustainability so that our shared resources are preserved.

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Supporting the Capacity Building of Island States in Indian Ocean

M.U.M. Ali Sabry PC*

The Indian Ocean region envisions a sustainable and prosperous maritime domain characterised by robust environmental stewardship, equitable resource management, and inclusive socio-economic development. This future hinges on harnessing the vast potential of the ocean, while safeguarding its health and resilience.

The Indian Ocean region is home to numerous island states that, like Sri Lanka, rely heavily on the ocean for their livelihood and sustenance. Safeguarding the health of the shared ocean resources requires collective efforts and collaboration among these states. To do this, we need to strengthen cooperation and foster in strong regional cooperation mechanisms to address the common challenges and to promote sustainable development. As the Chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Sri Lanka can play a crucial role in facilitating dialogue, information sharing and joint initiative among member states. Promoting marine conservation effort is also essential to protect the biodiversity and health of ocean ecosystems. Collaborative initiatives can be undertaken to establish marine protected areas (MPAS) and implement sustainable fishing practices, such as regulating the fishing quotas, promoting responsible fishing techniques and

combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

Supporting the capacity building of island states is crucial to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to manage and protect their ocean resources effectively. This includes providing training programs, technical assistance, and exchange platforms to facilitate the sharing of the best practices and experience. Advanced countries and big countries with resources could help and share their knowledge with the other less affluent and constrained economies so that we do it as a team. The sheer size of the Indian Ocean, calls for collaborative action as no one country can do it on their own. Supporting the capacity building of island states is crucial along with the development of a sustainable blue economy, which can contribute to ocean conservation and socio-economic wellbeing of the island states.

Supporting island states in developing eco-tourism, sustainable fisheries, renewable energy projects and other blue economy sectors can promote economic growth while minimising negative environmental impact. We also know the climate change is a major issue now. Addressing the impact of climate change is vital for the long-term health of the Indian Ocean region resources. Again, collaborative efforts should focus on

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reducing greenhouse emissions, facilitating climate change adaptation and resilience and supporting island states in implementing measures to mitigate the risk of sea level rise, ocean acidification and increased frequency of extreme weather events.

Strengthening the scientific collaboration and research initiative can provide valuable insight into health and shared ocean resources. Joint research projects can help understand the ecological dynamics, assess the impact of human activities, and inform evidence-based conservation and management strategies. For this, public support would be required, which highlights the importance of public governance. Towards this end, Sri Lanka is taking an initiative to promote the IORA day in March. On that day, students will participate in sustainable environmental programmes as well as ocean use. Through such measures, we hope that our younger generation will understand the gravity of these issues and the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead of us.

In conclusion, I would like to share two issues which Sri Lanka is impacted by. One is the IUU fishing, particularly using the Broughton trawlers. This has devastated our ocean environment and the ocean seabed and will, in the long run, have adverse consequences. So, we need to find ways for sustainable use of the ocean for the betterment of the fisheries. The second issue pertains to environmental accidents, of which we have had two in the recent past. The first was an explosion which took place in the MB X-press Pearl, which was carrying hazardous chemicals, and the second was the MT Blue Diamond, a very large crude carrier, which caught fire near Colombo. We need to be better prepared for such incidents. Towards that end, collaboration and cooperation among the member states is vital.

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Finding Solutions for Humankind's Common Challenges Through Multilateralism in Indian Ocean

Bendito dos Santos Freitas*

The theme of the 7th Indian Ocean Conference – "Moving towards a stable and sustainable Indian Ocean", is a global imperative that requires urgent attention and collective responsibility. Timor-Leste is making its first appearance at this very important conference. It is an opportunity for us to learn and to acquire enriched and abundant experiences from countries with long histories such as Australia, India, Europe, USA and many others that have used sophisticated technologies to manage the oceans for global security while also opening up new opportunities for economic growth.

As our attention shifts to the escalation of conflicts in the Middle East and the growing attacks by Houthi rebels on cargo ships bound for Europe, the United States and other countries have prompted all leaders, particularly those who share the vast waters of the Indian Ocean, to also analyse and deliver recommendations, and to act in order to maintain the ocean's freedom of navigation in accordance with international laws and international principles. Timor-Leste, a tiny nation that shares this ocean, feels compelled to participate and highlight the importance of this fundamental issue. The oceans represent life, stability, and humanity's most valuable resources. It was and continues to be a free passage for

centuries when human civilisations did not yet reach the level we are today.

We may recall the centuries old stories of sailors, also known as navigators. They took a long time to reach a certain point. Vasco de Gama of Portugal arrived in India in 1497, opening up the sea route from Western Europe to the East. Likewise, Marco Polo, a Venetian merchant and adventurer, travelled from Europe to Asia before arriving in China in 1271, as did many others. Following this series of brave sailors' adventures, the Portuguese eventually arrived in Timor, my country, where the influence is still felt today. At the time, many western sailors found the oceans to be a challenge in their pursuit of new discoveries. From then on, the world recognises various geographical points which eventually became a global road for navigation. Now we are here to share our thoughts and opinions on the strategic importance of the oceans in achieving human dreams.

The war in 21st century is marked by a combination of complexities and great challenges. In addition to the geopolitical challenges facing the Indian Ocean region, the new and different threats to peace and security such as terrorism, extremism and fundamentalism, cyber threats, organised crime, climate change, natural disasters and

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pandemics are new obstacles that pose great threat to humanity as a whole. Timor-Leste believes that multilateralism is the only answer to finding solutions for humankind's common challenges.

Multilateral cooperation is a necessity in the international community, and we are convinced that it can lead to win-win outcomes, ultimately resulting in the attainment of common goals and objectives through a range of tools and mechanisms for overcoming shared grievances and disagreements. We also believe that a multilateral rules base international order alone, sincere respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity remains the foundation for reviving the Indian Ocean as a strong community.

The Indian Ocean should remain as a free, open and inclusive space based on the United Nations Conventions on the Law of the Sea, UNCLOS, as the Constitution of the seas. We with our concert efforts, should actively contribute not only to the secure safety and security in the Indian Ocean region, but also to promote development and prosperity of the littoral nations by supporting trade and sustaining livelihoods, connectivity and resource utilisation in order to build a prosperous, stable and resilient Indian Ocean community which is able to cooperate closely to respond to a series of transboundary challenges in the region and the world.

It is a true moment for sharing ideas, and delivering substantive options and wisdom for a quality management of the Indian Ocean — A common vision for an ocean that we all expect to bring peace, development and prosperity and collective security.

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Developing A Resilient Maritime Security Architecture in the Indian Ocean

Anil Jai Singh*

Introduction

The recent series of events in the Indian Ocean littoral has served as a reminder of the constantly evolving security dynamic of this region, ranging from strategic geopolitical shifts and realignments to inter-state conflicts and a wide spectrum of low-intensity and non-traditional transnational challenges. These events have also been a timely reminder of how global disruptions can be caused by localised events spreading into the maritime domain, thus highlighting the importance of a resilient maritime security architecture in the region.

The shift in the global geopolitical and geo-economic centre of gravity to the Indo-Pacific over the last two decades or so has highlighted the importance of the Indian Ocean, as it provides the vital maritime connectivity between the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. With 60% of the global population resident in the Indo-Pacific and generating almost two-thirds of the global GDP, the safe and secure transit of trade and energy through the Indian Ocean is critical for the smooth functioning of the global economy. However, since most of the significant players in the region are resident in the Pacific and are constantly being kept on edge by China's belligerence in that region, the onus of ensuring the security of the vast oceanic space of the 'Indo' rests largely with India.

Defining Features that Impact Security

The Indian Ocean is defined by some unique features that shape the region's security discourse. Firstly, as already stated, it is a critical link between the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. In an interconnected world with trade dependencies transcending continents, and the resilience of global supply chains a pre-requisite for the well-being of the global economy, ensuring the smooth and uninterrupted flow of global commerce and energy is an inescapable imperative. More than 90,000 ships transit through the Indian Ocean[1] carrying 40% of global trade and 80% of energy to the Indo-Pacific. Three of the world's five largest economies are located in the Indo-Pacific including the two largest developing economies of China and India on an upward trajectory. Therefore, any disruption to the safe movement of shipping, however inconsequential, has wide-ranging repercussions on global supply chains. This was amply illustrated by the grounding of MV Ever Given in the Suez Canal in March 2021, which led to an interruption in the movement of ships through the Suez Canal for six days and an interruption of USD 9.6 billion worth of trade per day[2].

The second defining feature of the Indian Ocean is the location of choke points at both its ends. These include the strategically significant Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Hormuz and the

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Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. The Malacca Strait is probably the busiest narrow waterway in the world with upwards of 70,000 ships transiting through it annually. At its narrowest, it is only 1.5 nautical miles wide,[3] and can be easily used to disrupt the to and fro movement of trade and energy between the Indian and the Pacific Oceans. China considers this Strait a strategic vulnerability, and it is referred to as its Malacca Dilemma. Its neighbouring Straits (Lombok and Sunda) are also equally vulnerable to disruption. The Strait of Hormuz leading to the Arabian Gulf is critical for the flow of global oil and gas. More than 80% of the globe's oil and gas upwards of 60 % of India's oil and gas passes through this Strait; therefore, any crisis in the region affecting this movement can have catastrophic economic and security consequences.

The Bab-el-Mandeb Straits connecting the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea, and onwards to the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean is located in one of the most politically volatile regions of the world. 12% of global trade, including 30% of container traffic passes through it. Presently in the crosshairs of the Houthi rebels based in Yemen, their unrelenting attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and the Bab-el-Mandeb, coupled with the resurgence of piracy in the western Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea highlights its vulnerability. The vulnerability of these choke points notwithstanding, from an Indian Ocean security perspective, they enable better monitoring and tracking of extra-regional ship and submarine movements, leading to better situational awareness.

The third feature impacting Indian Ocean security is the disaggregated geopolitical construct of its littoral with widely divergent and unique internal and external security dynamics. Driven by strong parochial regional interests, convergence on issues of common concern is seldom achieved. The region is also marked by political instability, governance deficits, and economic stress. Frequent ethnic and internecine inter-state and intra-state conflicts in the region have led to disaffected populations with limited educational and employment opportunities becoming susceptible to inducement by criminal syndicates or insurgent outfits, thus fuelling further unrest and regional tensions. The region is also marked by major inter-state tensions and major trust deficits amongst countries in close proximity to each other.

The Indian Ocean is also dotted with numerous small island states. Their strategic location makes them attractive to external powers seeking to expand their sphere of influence in the region, making them vulnerable to economic inducement, often at the risk of compromising their sovereign interests in the long run. Perhaps, what may be of greater concern is the existential threat that many of them are facing of getting inundated due to global warming and rising sea levels.

The fourth feature that impacts regional security is the large extra-regional naval presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The emergence of a vast multitude of security challenges in the region has led countries to deploy their navies to protect their interests as well as ensure good order at sea. As it is also not possible for a single country to effectively tackle these, ships from like-minded navies operating in coordination with each other to address their individual and collective security challenges is a welcome development. Ships from the PLA Navy and the Russian Navy also maintain

a permanent presence in the Indian Ocean, ostensibly to protect their own maritime interests in the region. Djibouti, with its strategic location in the Horn of Africa, is home to a French, US, Chinese, Japanese, Spanish and Italian naval presence. France, which has 90% of its EEZ located in the Indian Ocean and considers itself an Indian Ocean power maintains a standing naval force in the region headed by a 2-star admiral to ensure the security of its Indian Ocean territories. Three US theatre commands have an operational presence in the Indian Ocean (INDOPACOM, CENTCOM and AFRICOM). The presence of some extra-regional powers does occasionally give rise to tense stand-offs at sea from resident countries who are resentful of their presence. Incidents between the US and Iranian navies are a frequent occurrence in the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean and run the risk of unintended escalation.

Indian Perspective

India's favourable geographical location in continental Asia with its peninsular land mass jutting almost 1000 miles into the sea in the centre of the Indian Ocean provides it a vantage maritime position. It straddles some of the world's most important international sea lanes and its pre-eminence as the leading maritime power in the Indian Ocean has rarely been challenged. Its multi-dimensional blue water navy has ensured that the country's national interests in the maritime domain are well protected across the globe. India is also conscious of its growing stature on the world stage, its economic progress as the world's fastest growing large economy, and its remarkable diplomatic outreach in recent years. This has

consolidated its status as a preferred security partner and a first responder in a crisis in the region. It takes this responsibility very seriously, and nowhere is this more evident than in the maritime domain, where even seemingly minor events can have major global repercussions.

From an Indian perspective, the following are the major concerns that threaten maritime security and good order in the Indian Ocean:

- The expanding Chinese footprint in the Indian Ocean.
- The emerging Great Power contestation.
- Challenges in the region and India's extended neighbourhood.
- The wide spectrum of non-traditional threats in the maritime domain.
- The effects of climate change.

The China Factor

Perhaps the single most important external factor shaping the future trajectory of maritime security in the Indian Ocean is the rise of China and its efforts at re-orienting the existing rules-based international order at sea into one with 'Chinese characteristics'. In its 'Mahanian' approach towards becoming the global numero uno through maritime dominance, it is already the world's leading maritime power and is now seeking to dominate the strategic sea lanes in the Indian Ocean through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its economic and military diplomacy, coercive or otherwise. It is attempting to reshape global geopolitics by creating an alternate world order through its three Gs – the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI) and the Global Civilisation Initiative (GCI) and

considers itself the leader of the developing world. Its leadership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the expansion of BRICS, and its expanding economic footprint in ASEAN, the western Pacific and across the Indian Ocean littoral gives it a major say in the 'Global South'. Its trade surplus with most countries of the world, and increasing trade asymmetry with India gives it a disproportionate economic leverage in the region. Even though recent headwinds have dented its economy, it is too premature to write the epitaph of Chinese ambitions. A USD 17 trillion economy growing at over 5% annually cannot be scoffed at. Its spectacular warship-building programme has catapulted the PLA Navy from an inconsequential brown water force barely capable of defending its own waters in 1979 to the largest navy in the world by numbers. It has more than 350 ships in commission and is adding 20 or more new ships and submarines year after year. However, its impressive numbers notwithstanding, it still lags behind the US Navy in capability and technology and is conscious of its operational limitations in its 'far abroad'. Neither of its two aircraft carriers has ventured beyond the Second Island Chain, and despite a permanent presence of 6-8 ships in the Indian Ocean, it has steered clear of the Indian Navy despite the tense standoff along the land border since 2020. However, with its ongoing naval expansion and the experience it is gaining in blue water operations, this is likely to change within a decade or so, if not sooner. The PLA Navy intends to be a multi-dimensional and technology-intensive 450-ship navy by 2030 with four or five aircraft carriers, 20 or so nuclear attack submarines (SSN) and at least one-third of its surface force being blue water capable. China's unfavourable maritime geography restricts its ability to project power from its own shores, and therefore constrains its ambition of becoming a dominant global maritime power. Its aggressive maritime posture and constant baiting of the US Navy over Taiwan and Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS) could hinder its wider global ambition. While this may precipitate the emerging great power contestation between the two, the sea space to project power and get access to the Atlantic, both of which are essential to its global ambition is provided by the Indian Ocean. India, though the resident power, is also vulnerable with 90% of its trade by volume and more than 80% of its oil and gas transiting across the Indian Ocean. It must therefore develop the necessary capacity, capability and leverage to shape the outcomes in the region and not allow itself to get shaped by them.

Chinese Economic and Military Diplomacy

While China is addressing its naval limitations, it is steadily manoeuvring its way into the region through its economic and military diplomacy and is gaining important footholds that directly impact India's and the Indian Ocean region's security dynamics. It has supplied two old Ming class conventional submarines (SSK) to Bangladesh and one to Myanmar and has succeeded in gaining a vital presence in the Bay of Bengal by constructing a submarine base for the Bangladesh Navy (BNS Sheikh Hasina), which was commissioned in March 2023. This facility, manned and equipped by the Chinese, will be able to provide logistic and maintenance support to its own submarines and

enable their deployment in the Bay of Bengal, which it was restricted in doing hitherto because of the long transit distance of over 8,000 kms from its mainland. The support facilities being set up in Karachi and Gwadar for the eight modern Type 039 AIP equipped submarines and the four frigates being procured by Pakistan will be able to support China's ship and submarine operations in the Arabian Sea, besides using the PN to contain India's unfettered access to the Indian Ocean. In addition to its first overseas base located in the strategically significant port of Djibouti, which is reportedly being extended to berth aircraft carriers, its access to strategically located ports in the Indian Ocean through its BRI will legitimise its naval presence along its Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC). The distinct possibility of a Chinese Carrier Battle Group in the Indian Ocean by the end of this decade could impact India's trade and the security of its energy on both its seaboards.

Regional Dissonance

The recent spate of elections in South Asia has led to some uncertainty in the region. While the reassuring outcome of the Bangladesh election ensures a status quo in its bilateral relationship with India, irritants still remain and an 'India Out' campaign is brewing in the opposition. The political and economic uncertainty in Pakistan could have regional repercussions and needs to be watched closely. However, it is the bilateral relationship with Maldives, consequent to the change of government there that merits concern. India has taken a mature and calibrated approach to President Muizzu's persistent demand for India to withdraw its military presence in the country, coupled with his first

overseas visit being to China. India's 'military' presence in the Maldives comprises two helicopters and one Dornier 228 aircraft supported by about 80 personnel is primarily meant for Search and Rescue (SAR), casualty evacuation from the far-flung islands scattered across a 900 km stretch and maritime surveillance of Maldives large 90,000 sq. km EEZ. India has also invested in augmenting the country's coastal security architecture. In all these areas, Maldives has practically no capacity or capability of its own.

Maldives' geographical proximity to India has been a source of great support to the country over the years. In 2014, when the country suffered a drinking water crisis, India provided over 1,200 tons of drinking water. China, on the other hand, is located 3,000 miles from the Maldives and its primary interest is in scouting for suitable islands to set up various surveillance and research facilities in the Maldivian archipelago. It is limited in its ability to provide support if at all it is inclined to do so. Its past track record with other countries suggests otherwise, as Sri Lanka discovered during its economic crisis and Pakistan is doing so by the day. Maldives already owes China USD 1.4 bn (one-third of its GDP); its economy is in the doldrums and the President is seeking a bailout from the International Monetary Fund. President Muizzu is, therefore, fully aware of the debt trap he is walking his country into. For India, the possibility of a permanent Chinese maritime presence so close to Indian waters is not a welcome development. Hence, India's recent initiatives to develop naval facilities in the Lakshadweep islands and hosting of the forthcoming Combined Commanders Conference

on the two aircraft carriers steaming to the Lakshadweep Islands is sending a timely message.

The Non-traditional Threat

There has been a shift in focus from traditional inter-state conflicts to the wide spectrum of non-traditional and transnational security challenges in the maritime domain. The Houthi attacks on shipping in the Red Sea from Yemen have raised the spectre of maritime terrorism and the scourge of piracy has returned in the western Indian Ocean. However, this is just one of many challenges that impact security in the Indian Ocean. These include Illegal Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing, human, and narcotics smuggling, illegal migration, gun running etc. Of these, IUU fishing is considered the gravest because of its long-term implications on food security, economic sustenance of coastal communities and preserving the ecological balance of the delicate marine biosphere. The FAO has estimated that IUU fishing accounts for 20% of the global catch and this figure varies between 16 and 34% in the Indian Ocean[4]. China is the world's biggest offender and the Indian Ocean is its happy hunting ground. The Indian Ocean region is also very susceptible to the vagaries of climate change, which is causing increasingly frequent and intense extreme weather events leading to widespread destruction and extensive loss of life and property. This further impoverishes economically weak societies and makes them vulnerable to inimical external interests. Global warming and the consequent rise in sea levels is leading to the destruction of the sensitive marine ecosystem due to acidification and salinisation with many small island states and low-lying coastal states facing inundation. The effects of climate change in the maritime domain are irreversible, but robust mitigation strategies could retard or at least arrest further damage. However, whether enough is being done to address this or promote sustainable Blue Economy development merits further discussion.

Maritime Domain Awareness

The wide spectrum of maritime threats with numerous potential flashpoints has underlined the importance of ensuring effective maritime domain awareness (MDA) across the length and breadth of the Indian Ocean region. The Indian Navy has developed a robust multi-dimensional MDA capability over the years. Its fleet of P8I Long-range Maritime Patrol Aircraft has greatly enhanced air surveillance of both, the surface and the sub-surface domains. The recent acquisition of the MQ-9 Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) has been a very effective force multiplier. The likely acquisition of another 15 or so such drones which are on the anvil will greatly enhance our capacity in reconnoitring an area for extended durations. The recent approval for the procurement of 15 MRMR (Medium-range maritime reconnaissance) aircraft for the Indian Navy and the Coast Guard will enable effective patrolling of our strategic maritime neighbourhood. The Navy's surface fleet is maintaining a brisk operational tempo with over a dozen major surface combatants on multi-mission deployments across the Indian Ocean in areas of interest at any given time and provide a high degree of situational awareness. These ships keep a close watch on the maritime activity in their areas and can take timely action to counter or pre-empt a

developing situation. In the ongoing Red Sea imbroglio and the re-emergence of piracy in the Arabian Sea and the western Indian Ocean, the Indian Navy was quickly able to ramp up its deployment from five ships to 10 and thereafter to 12, which included guided missile destroyers and frigates to protect the merchant shipping transiting through these waters from piracy and perhaps even more importantly, nip this problem in the bud.

The undersea domain is now becoming a matter of concern. Frequent forays by Chinese research vessels probing the depths of the Indian Ocean to gather hydrographic data and carry out seabed mapping etc points to a future PLA Navy submarine presence in the Indian Ocean. This will require effective submarine detection and tracking mechanisms at selected areas depending on the likely transit routes of submarines. Indian submarines are effectively deployed on operational patrols on intelligence gathering, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) missions in areas of interest and can also monitor the activities of surface forces. There is an ambitious plan to develop unmanned underwater capability in various configurations to strengthen undersea surveillance. The importance of enhancing regional MDA led to the establishment of the 'Indo-Pacific Partnership for MDA' (IPMDA) at its Summit meeting in May 2022.

Another important element of coordinated regional security is timely Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR). The genesis of the Quad also lies in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami. The IN has taken the lead in this. Every Indian Navy ship carries relief material at all times. This facilitates the quick redeployment of any IN ship in the vicinity to the scene of a crisis and has established India's credentials as a first responder and a preferred security partner in the region.

Information Sharing

One of the key elements of effective MDA is information sharing since the vastness of the ocean precludes any single country going about it alone. The Indian Ocean Region Information Fusion Centre (IOR-IFC) located in Gurugram has observers from 12 friendly countries and partnership arrangements with more than 25 countries and 45 organisations to obtain, analyse disseminate and exchange information on maritime developments related to non-traditional threats, including the suspicious movement of ships in the region. With similar IFCs located in Singapore, Seychelles and Madagascar, most of the Indo-Pacific is covered. In our immediate neighbourhood, India is integrating Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives and Mauritius with the country's coastal radar network to ensure seamless radar coverage and pre-empt any adventurism in the neighbourhood.

Combined Maritime Force

A Combined Maritime Force (CMF) comprising 41 navies, including India's, is tasked with upholding the international rules-based order in the Indian Ocean region. It includes five Task Forces (CTFs 150-154), each with a different task and region. The importance of MDA has also led to many countries entering into bilateral and multilateral formal and informal information sharing arrangements with Indo-Pacific MDA, now a part of the Quad discussions.

Maritime Diplomacy

There has been a flurry of activity in recent years to strengthen the regional security architecture through various diplomatic initiatives. Besides re-energising existing mechanisms like BIMSTEC through multi-modal connectivity projects, including land-linked countries like Nepal and Bhutan, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) as the nodal Indian Ocean region multilateral mechanism, the emergence of numerous bilaterals and minilaterals has led to a greater convergence on shared concerns and towards enhancing the effectiveness of larger multilateral mechanisms of which they are a part. For example, the 2+2 Dialogues amongst individual Quad partners has led to an improvement in bilateral relations and greater multi-sectoral cooperation amongst them. India's diplomatic and security outreach to West Asia has led to a remarkable improvement in our engagement with that region. The I2U2 (India-Israel-UAE-US) mechanism has led to a more coherent discourse on security and connectivity in that region. The recent IMEEC initiative, though being spoken of as an alternative to China's BRI, is important in its own right. In the East, the India-led Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) with its seven pillars related to the maritime domain is finding resonance with similar regional initiatives like the AOIP (ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific) on issues like disaster risk reduction, climate change and maritime security to name just three.

Frequent exercises amongst like-minded navies, aimed at improving interoperability have become more frequent and are increasing in scope and scale. Foundational Agreements on logistic support, information sharing, common communication protocols have enabled seamless coordinated operations. The recently concluded MILAN exercise held in Visakhapatnam from 19 to 27 February 2024, which brought the navies of 51 countries together on a common platform including the US, Russian and Iranian navies is a testament to the success of navies working together to address common threats to maritime security.

Capacity and Capability Building

From an Indian perspective, regional capacity and capability building amongst countries in the region is integral to establishing a resilient maritime security architecture in the region. The SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) policy outlined by Prime Minister Modi in Mauritius in 2015 underpins India's engagement with the Indo-Pacific region. However, despite some impressive achievements, there still seems to be an underlying trust deficit amongst countries in the region suspicious of India's motives. Some of this is driven by their perceived need to balance India's influence as a large neighbour but most of it is due to their divisive internal politics. India's investment in its Neighbourhood First Policy under the SAGAR rubric is focussed on allaying regional suspicions and reduce the existing trust deficit through an inclusive and cooperative approach towards regional capacity building in its immediate and extended neighbourhood through a larger canvas of activity that addresses some of the core concerns of the region. For example, India has been at the forefront in projecting the impact of climate change in the region at various international

fora. It has supported numerous societal initiatives pertaining to healthcare, education, institution building, technology development amongst others. During its presidentship of the G20, it was instrumental in focussing attention on the Global South and the inclusion of the African Union as a permanent member. The G20 now includes almost 80% of the world's population and about 90% of global GDP.

Conclusion

India's maritime focus in the last decade has highlighted the importance of the maritime domain in its economic and security calculus. As the leading Indian Ocean power, it has led numerous initiatives to enhance the maritime security architecture of the region through its inclusive capacity-building efforts in the region. Its political, economic and military diplomacy under the rubric of its SAGAR policy is aimed at finding convergences to reduce the existing trust deficits, address the governance challenges and address the multitude of traditional, non-traditional and trans-national security challenges that plague this region, ranging from kinetic inter-state conflicts to the ravages of climate change. Regional capacity building and mature and calibrated diplomacy is the key to a building a secure Indian Ocean region. As an emerging global power, with a distinct maritime orientation, it will have to invest more effort and resources to sustain and enhance its efforts at developing an inclusive, resilient and effective regional security architecture, to ensure its own regional pre-eminence against external challenges and hold its own in the future great power contestation.

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I(ndia)-T(aiwan) in the Indo-Pacific

Prakash Nanda*

During his electioneering in January, Taiwan's President-elect Lai Ching-te had pointed out how Cross-Strait relations and geopolitics would weigh on the minds of the Taiwanese voters, given China's unprecedented interference in the island nation's elections. He had accused Beijing of using "military threats, economic coercion, cognitive warfare, and misinformation" to manipulate voters. Lai represents the ruling Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP). He will be sworn as the President on May 20. At present, he is the Vice President in the outgoing regime of President Tsai Ing-wen.

It is a fact that Beijing had, ahead of Taiwan's election, increased pressure on the island by sending large numbers of military aircraft and warships towards the island, conveying a strong message to the Taiwanese voters that they must make a choice between "war and peace," suggesting that a win by the DPP candidate, whom Beijing characterised as a separatist, could increase the risk of cross-strait conflict. China views Lai as an advocate for Taiwan independence, based on his younger, more vocal days, though Lai rejects that description now.

Incidentally, Chinese President Xi Jinping has taken a hard line on cross-strait relations throughout his tenure. His New Year's address this year included an unusually strong message to Taiwan voters on cross-strait unification, which he called an inevitability.[1] Xi asserts that China prefers peaceful unification (or "reunification") but has refused to disavow the use of military force to achieve this goal or as a response to any declaration of formal independence by Taiwan. And this explains why Beijing had increased pressure on the island's voters to choose between "war and peace."

China's communist rulers claim sovereignty over Taiwan and refer to the island as "Taiwan region". Beijing demands that all countries accept its "One China" principle, which states that Taiwan is part of its territory. It is against this background that Beijing's preferred candidate was the Kuomintang (KMT)'s Hou Yu-ih. KMT, whose founder Chiang Kai-shek fled China after his defeat in the civil war to the Communists in 1949, believes also in the "One-China Principle", though it wants the whole of China to have democratic rule.

However, the fact remains that whether it is the ruling DPP, the opposition KMT, or the third party, the Taiwan People's Party (TPP) that competed in the January- elections, all claim that they are best placed to preserve Taiwan's de facto independence and peace with China, despite differences in how warmly they would approach Beijing. Lai has promised to continue the approach of President Tsai Ing-wen: keeping Beijing at

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arm's length while seeking to avoid conflict.

While the DPP may have been the most outspoken about the growing threat posed by Beijing, it also talks of maintaining the status quo in the Taiwan Strait and is in favour of dialogue with China. Lai has said that he would remain "pragmatic" and "always hold a friendly attitude" toward dialogue with China. "Peace is priceless, and war has no winners." In Lai's view, there is no need to declare Taiwan as an independent country. For all practical purposes, "The Republic of China, Taiwan, is already a sovereign independent country."[2]

It is important to note that no regime in China's thousands of years of history has ever had any effective control over Taiwan. In fact, until 1895, when China "ceded" Formosa (ancient name of Taiwan) to Japan in perpetuity, following the latter's victory over the former in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, no Chinese family from the mainland was allowed to migrate to Taiwan. More interestingly, when Japan relinquished its sovereignty over Taiwan (after her defeat in World War II) under the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951, it just relinquished its sovereignty over Taiwan without transferring it back to China.

As Taiwan's former Vice President Annette Lu argues (this writer had interviewed her in 2001), "the real key to territorial relationship between Taiwan and China can be found in the San Francisco Treaty of 1951. The Treaty's purpose was for the victorious Allies to deal with the unresolved issues left over from World War II. Japan agreed to relinquish sovereignty over Taiwan

and the Pescadores Islands, but the question of which entity would control Taiwan was left unanswered".

Implications of a Chinese takeover of Taiwan

Taiwan coming under the control of China will disturb the contours of geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific like nothing else. Its very location near the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea makes its stability crucial for one of the world's busiest shipping routes, connecting northeast Asia with the Middle East (West Asia) and Europe. Any conflict over Taiwan will adversely affect the trade of food, energy sources, natural resources and consumer goods, driving up their prices.

Secondly, Taiwan's defence is a testing case for the US allies and friends that Washington has the ability to protect their interests. Taiwan has always played a vital role in strategic thinking on the defence of Japan and of the US position in the Western Pacific, which, in turn, is considered by China to be the core of its "first island chain". Once it falls, the security of Japan and other American allies in Asia gets seriously endangered. It will give China a great geopolitical advantage by securing uninterrupted access to the Indo-Pacific and reduce Tokyo's security on its southern flank.

The core feature of US alliances is their shared commitment to respond collectively to armed attacks, though different US treaties contain slight variations in how they articulate this requirement. In the Indo-Pacific, countries of high commitment

for the US include Australia, Japan and the Republic of Korea (South Korea), with each of whom the US has a concrete security treaty. In fact, the largest concentration of US troops is now in Japan (50,000; this is 15000 more than what it has in Germany). The US troops in the Republic of Korea number 28,000. Besides, in this part of the world, America has security alliances with the Philippines and Thailand.

As highlighted by the White House in February 2022,[3] the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States has the following distinct features, among others. As per the US Strategy paper, "A free and open Indo-Pacific can only be achieved if we build collective capacity for a new age. The alliances, organisations, and rules that the United States and its partners have helped to build must be adapted", it said, adding "We will build collective capacity within and beyond the region, including by:

- Deepening our five regional treaty alliances with Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK), the Philippines, and Thailand.
- Strengthening relationships with leading regional partners, including India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam, and the Pacific Islands.
- Contributing to an empowered and unified ASEAN.
- Strengthening the Quad and delivering on its commitments.
- Supporting India's continued rise and regional leadership.
- Partnering to build resilience in the Pacific Islands.

- Forging connections between the Indo-Pacific and the Euro-Atlantic.
- Expanding US diplomatic presence in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands".

Thus, Taiwan is a vital "partner" in this Indo-Pacific strategy, given its geopolitical and geo-economic hefts. And America cannot afford to be seen as surrendering it to China.

Thirdly, Chinese control over Taiwan will have several adverse consequences for the crucial production of computer chips i.e., integrated circuits, or semiconductors. Taiwan's critical role in the global semiconductor supply chain makes it extremely important to the global industry, and an even juicier prize for Beijing. Semiconductors are the heart of all electronic devices, and power telecommunications systems; industrial controllers and manufacturing equipment; automobile systems, aircraft avionics, and advanced weaponry systems. Although the US accounts for nearly half of global semiconductor sales, its share of global semiconductor manufacturing has dropped reportedly from 37 percent in 1990 to 12 percent in February 2021. This is because it is cheaper for US companies — which still lead in semiconductor IP and research and development — to contract out fabrication than it is to build onshore plants, which typically cost billions of dollars.

Incidentally, Taiwan companies with chip-making fabs, also known as foundries, command 63 percent of the worldwide market revenue in the chip business. In this, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation (TSMC) is a big player.

According to TSMC chairman Mark Liu, Taiwan is "the Silicon Shield". "That means the world needs Taiwan's high-tech industry support. So, they will not let the war happen in this region because it goes against the interest of every country in the world," he says.

According to noted American columnist Thomas L. Friedman, though China is an emerging superpower, it still lacks the capacity to develop its own vertically integrated microchip industry as it has so far largely failed to master the physics and hardware to manipulate matter at the nano-scale, a skill required to mass-produce super-sophisticated microprocessors. "That is why", Friedman argues, "today — as much as China wants Taiwan for reasons of ideology, it wants TSMC in the pocket of Chinese military industries for reasons of strategy. And as much as US strategists are committed to preserving Taiwan's democracy, they are even more committed to ensuring that TSMC doesn't fall into China's hands for reasons of strategy".

India, too, has vested interests in Taiwan's safety as it is very weak in semiconductor manufacturing and heavily dependent on the island nation. Though 65% of India's massive electronic imports are from China, the fact remains that most of the electronic products imported from China are made with Taiwanese chips. Keeping this in mind, the Government of India is wooing Taiwan by calling for expressions of interest (EoI) for setting up or expanding existing semiconductor wafer and device fabrication (fab) facilities in the country, or even acquisition of semiconductor fabs outside India.

Fourthly, there is the cause of democracy and its furtherance in the Indo-Pacific. That Taiwan is a thriving and prosperous liberal society rejects the Communist China's argument that democracy can be only with the Chinese characteristics and there is no democracy that has universal characteristics. What Beijing can do to a democracy has been seen in Hong Kong. Democracy there has been virtually crushed, its promises to the contrary notwithstanding.

Therefore, it is said that if Taiwan is allowed to revert to Chinese autocracy with its virtual annexation by the Communist mainland, then it would have bleak political implications for the world in general and Indo-Pacific in particular. Even established democracies in the region such as Japan, South Korea and Australia may choose to accommodate Beijing by changing their foreign and domestic policies.

All these considerations — strategic, economic, and ideological — make a compelling case for the maintenance of the status quo in Taiwan. The world cannot afford to let China take over Taiwan forcefully. Any such misadventure on the part of China in this regard needs to be resisted.

The India - Taiwan Relationship

A stable, secure, liberal and democratic Taiwan in the Indo-Pacific is also in India's national interests in more senses than one. That Taiwan is important for India has been recognised remarkably with Young Liu, the Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of Foxconn, the Taiwanese multinational electronics contract manufacturer, being bestowed

with the prestigious Padma Bhushan award on the eve of India's Republic Day this year. Foxconn, headquartered in Taiwan, stands as the world's largest contract manufacturer, responsible for assembling approximately 70% of iPhones. The company has strategically diversified its production away from China in response to disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and escalating geopolitical tensions.

Of course, since 2016, when Tsai Ing-wen became Taiwan's President, the island nation has been trying to lessen its excessive dependence on China as a destination of trade and investment. Taiwanese companies are diversifying and ramping up investments, under Tsai's "New Southbound Policy", in other parts of the world, particularly in Singapore, Vietnam, and neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia. This has led to what is called "economic decoupling with China". However, of late, Taiwan has found it difficult to significantly increase foreign investment into Singapore, Vietnam, and other countries in Southeast Asia. India is now getting increased attention. And there seem to be both geopolitical and geo-economic reasons behind Taiwan realising the importance of India.

First, India has undertaken many business reforms. In a bid to attract foreign investment, the Indian government has eased foreign direct investment (FDI) restrictions, such as raising foreign equity caps for insurance and defence, leading to significant progress in terms of improving its overall business environment.

Secondly, India is showing, of late, its digital competitiveness. High-tech companies in sectors such as telecommunications, information technology, pharmaceuticals, textiles, and engineering are equal in their sophistication and prominence to international counterparts.

Thirdly, there is a massive consumer market in the country. India has a large and healthy middle class. Indeed, India is the world's largest market for manufactured goods and services and ranks number 3 out of 141 economies for market size according to the WEF's Global Competitiveness Index. That market is only anticipated to grow. The WEF estimates that India's total consumption expenditure will grow to USD 5.7-6 trillion by 2030.

Fourthly, India is increasingly inclined to be with the United States, Taiwan's ultimate protector. India does have, of course, its strategic autonomy and in the ongoing Ukrainian War, it may be reluctant to take sides, given its traditional friendly ties with Russia. But, when it comes to the Indo-Pacific, it is inseparable these days from the US. Both India and the Unites States are militarily, economically and diplomatically closer like never before. The two are together in cementing their partnership further with the fellow Indo-Pacific democracies such as South Korea, Japan and Australia. Taiwan fits very well in this scheme of things.

Fifthly, probably enough attention has not been attached to the fact, but Taiwan seems to realise it very well, that though India pursues the so-called 'One-China policy" like the US and many others, in recent years in all its official parleys, including with China, New Delhi has strictly avoided the mention of One-China policy. The last time India

mentioned it was way back in 2009. In fact, Ms Sushma Swaraj, the then External Affairs Minister (EAM), soon after Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed office in 2014, had openly said that if China is not committed to "One-India" (vexed territorial disputes between them and Beijing's support to Pakistan on the issue of Kashmir), why should it expect us to pronounce our commitment to One-China policy? This remark had significant implications for India-Taiwan ties.

Sixthly, it was Modi, who as the then General Secretary of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), had visited Taiwan in 1999. As the Chief Minister of Gujarat, he had invited in 1911 the largest ever Taiwanese business delegation to the state. In 1912, Gujarat signed an agreement with Taiwan's China Steel Corp (CSC) to set up an electrical steel plant in Dahej.

Seventhly, Taiwan has also appreciated that it was under Modi as the Prime Minister that Minister of State for External Affairs Ms Meenakshi Lekhi attended virtually the second swearing-in ceremony of Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-Wen in 2020, along with Rahul Kaswan, another BJP parliamentarian. This gesture was particularly significant as China has always been a huge limiting factor for India in its dealings with Taiwan. China baulks at anything that smacks of "official" dealings with Taiwan. It always reminds New Delhi of its "one China principle".

Eighthly, it is again under Modi's premiership that in 2018, India's Parliamentary Committee on External Affairs urged the government to reconsider its "deferential foreign policy towards China." India is "overly cautious" about China's sensitivities on Taiwan and Tibet, but Beijing hasn't shown the "same deference" while dealing with New Delhi's sovereignty concerns linked to Arunachal Pradesh or China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the Committee said. India can't continue with a "conventionally deferential foreign policy towards China" and must adopt a "flexible approach", the Committee recommended. "The Committee strongly feels that the Government should contemplate using all options including its relations with Taiwan, as part of such an approach".

Viewed thus, it is indeed a great time for New Delhi to deepen its political ties with Taipei, particularly when the latter is so keen and responsive. So far, Taiwanese investments in India are insignificant and Taiwanese companies have a relatively small footprint in the country. Bilateral trade between the two countries has risen, but very slowly; it grew from a little over USD 1 billion in 2001 to USD 8.5 billion in 2022.

But this state of affairs could change. Kao Shien-Quey, Deputy Minister for Taiwan's National Development, told a group of international journalists in Taipei on July 2, 2023, that "there is a huge scope of collaboration between New Delhi and Taipei in areas of emerging and critical technologies, including manufacturing of semiconductors and electronics equipment". Leading Taiwanese tech giants are looking at India as a key destination to boost their global supply chains, he added.

As per C.C. Chen, Taiwan's Vice Minister at

the Ministry of Economic Affairs (MOEA), chemicals accounted for 22.9% of Taiwan's exports to India in 2022, followed by plastics and rubber products, as well as electronic components and parts, both at 17.5%. Machinery parts made up 10.2% of the total exports. However, in early 2023, there was a significant shift as electronic parts and components surpassed chemicals, making up 34.2% of all shipments. As of now, there are around 150 Taiwanese companies doing business in India, most of which are small-and-medium-sized enterprises, but then, as Chen says, now there are also big electronics players such as Foxconn, Wistron, and Pegatron, which manufacture iPhones.

Chen emphasises that Taiwan's strengths include manufacturing and playing a key role in global supply chains related to "semiconductors, smart machinery components, and petrochemicals, but "now we are moving into electronics manufacturing. That's the latest stage of development. For the time being, our companies are staying in China, but they gradually need to find backup or future manufacturing sites. They need to diversify away from China in order to increase their resilience."[4]

Apple contract manufacturers Wistron, Pegatron, and Foxconn have poured investment into India in recent years, according to Chen. Foxconn is apparently injecting another USD 500 million into its iPhone unit in Tamil Nadu, he said, while predicting that "The whole Apple supply chain will follow suit".

South India is home to a number of Taiwanese industries. Footwear manufacturer Apache is based in Andhra Pradesh, textile company JINTEX and shoemaker Feng Tay are located in Tamil Nadu, and major Taiwanese companies including USD 30 billion Wistron Corporation, Mediatek, Delta Electronics and D-Link are based in Karnataka. The Taiwan-based Century Development Corporation (CDC), which develops industrial parks, is developing an industrial park in Bengaluru, otherwise famous as the IT capital of India, that will be accommodating 100 companies from Taiwan. TEMICO Motors India Pvt. Ltd has already started the construction of a factory in the park.

Foxconn, which assembles around 70% of iPhones and is world's largest contract manufacturer, has signed a Letter of Intent (LOI) with the Karnataka government to invest around USD 350 million to set up a facility for manufacturing sub -assembly components for smart phones, specifically mechanical enclosures of iPhones. It will also invest USD 250 million for semiconductor manufacturing equipment.

However, what is a noteworthy development is that Taiwanese companies are now trying to locate themselves more and more in Western India, away from South India, which is, geographically speaking, nearer Taipei. Taiwan has already announced officially that it would expand its presence in the country by opening a representative office in Mumbai this year. The Mumbai Taipei Economic and Cultural Center will be Taiwan's third in India; it has one in New Delhi and one in Chennai. The one in New Delhi is virtually

Taiwan's embassy in the absence of formal diplomatic ties under India's recognition of "One-China policy". Similarly, New Delhi's office in Taipei, the India-Taipei Association, is headed by a senior Indian diplomat.

Taiwan's Foreign Affairs Ministry has said that the aim of opening a centre in Mumbai was to further advance "substantive ties" with India and "deepen exchanges and cooperation. It has noted that *"Since the TECC in Chennai was set up in 2012, nearly 60 percent of all Taiwanese businesses investing and opening factories in India have chosen to develop their operations in southern India. Chennai and its surrounding areas have thus benefited from the investments made by Taiwanese manufacturing industries. The establishment of the TECC in Mumbai is expected to have a similar effect in western India and will help expand mutually beneficial trade and investment opportunities between Taiwan and India.*[5]

However, this decision to look at Western India has both economic and political dimensions. For offshore financial market investors, India's first International Financial Services Center (IFSC) has been set up at Gujarat International Tec-City (GIFT City) near Ahmedabad. Recent changes in tax regulations include the waiver of several tax liabilities like goods and services tax (GST), dividend distribution tax, and capital gains tax for entities operating in the IFSC GIFT City. According to tax experts, Category III alternative investment funds (AIF) set up in IFSC GIFT City will benefit from zero tax on bond trading and zero tax on derivative trading, which is in line with offshore treaties. GIFT City is modelled along the hybrid structure of Singapore's financial centre.

No wonder then that Young Liu, the chairman of Foxconn, has expressed great optimism for Gujarat's semiconductor industry sector, saying that the state will always be their first choice for investment. At a recent seminar in Gandhinagar, Liu added, "I can feel the determination of the Indian government and I am very optimistic about where it will be headed. Prime Minister Modi once mentioned to me that 'IT' stands for India and Taiwan…Taiwan is and will be your most trusted and reliable partner."[6]

However, the Taiwanese companies have two principal challenges in doing business in India. One, unlike in Communist China, they have language barriers, cultural differences and a raucous democracy. Taiwanese executives have to adopt a business management style with traits and nuances. Two, there is always the China-factor, given the fact that there are many Leftist elements in Indian trade unions, media, academia and political parties that are admirers of China. In fact, a Foxconn unit in Tamil Nadu faced labour unrest in 2021, an internal intelligence note exclusively accessed by Indian news magazine "THE WEEK" pointed out "Chinese aid to the left leaning workforce inside Foxconn" as the reason for the labour unrest. The note also said that "it is no secret that China was aggrieved over these factories, as, earlier, 48 per cent of the components for Apple iPhone were produced in China".[7]

The Indian presence in Taiwan is small but

significant. Though relations between Taipei and New Delhi have been essentially commercial, some noticeable changes have been noticed, of late, involving the dimensions of "human resources" and "security". Big-time Indian business investments in Taiwan is virtually nil; all efforts are on to attract Taiwanese investments in India. There are some agreements between the Taiwanese business houses and their Indian counterparts; but these are at the non-governmental level. Officially, though, there have been the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement and Customs Mutual Assistance Agreement that were signed in July 2011, followed by the amended Bilateral Investment Agreement (BIT) in 2018. These were done to promote Taiwanese investments in India.

There are also some Memorandum of Understandings (MOU) for promoting scientific cooperation and educational exchanges. Particular mention may be made here of the importance of "Human Resources". In the absence of any tangible investments in Taiwan, what India is focusing on is to utilise the services of its talented and skilled manpower, which is well versed with the English language, in Taiwan. In other words, one can say that "human resources" is fast becoming an Indian diplomatic tool in Taiwan, something India has done successfully in the United States, Canada, Europe and Australia.

Among international students studying in Taiwan, Indians are the fastest-growing group. Currently, Indians are ranked as the top 10 groups of international students in Taiwan, and most of them are pursuing a Master's degree or PhD. Most

Indian students in Taiwan major in engineering, national sciences, life sciences, medical and public health, business, and management areas. Taiwanese universities prefer to recruit more Indian students because they speak fluent English and excel in various aspects. Many Indian students were recruited into research institutes such as Academia Sinica or high-tech companies in Hsinchu Science Park.

Taiwan is home to about 5,000 Indian citizens and some members of the diaspora community. The Indian community in Taiwan consists of businesspersons, restaurateurs, academicians, engineers, artists, students and think tankers. Most Indians in Taiwan hold white collar jobs and are considered among the highly educated in the expatriate community. Considered a closed-knit affluent society, Indians have made significant strides in Taiwan. The Indian community has played a distinct role not only in becoming a part of Taiwan's economic boom, but by also contributing to the Indian economy.

Security becoming a factor in India's relations with Taiwan is a recent phenomenon. India has given enough indication that it would not approve of China's forcible annexation of Taiwan. India's strategic elites, including government officials, believe that a successful Chinese invasion of Taiwan will change the political and military balance of power in the Indo-Pacific. If China succeeds and emerges as a victor, then Washington will most probably retract to the safety of its borders with Canada and Mexico. Southeast Asia will buckle up and prefer to bandwagon with the dragon

rather than confront it. Middle powers such as Japan and Australia will face an acute political crisis – either accommodate China or develop sufficient military deterrents, including nuclear weapons.

Most importantly, a victorious Beijing will have no reason to accommodate India. The pressure on India's borders will ratchet up because of the newfound confidence of China's military and leadership. Here, the idea is that if China remains worried over the future of Taiwan, which, in turn, has the support and backing of the US and its allies in the Indo-Pacific, then it would be a good thing for India as Beijing will hesitate to open another battlefront against India. In other words, Taiwan currently distracts China from amassing its expanding military power on India's borders. And this explains why increasingly more and more voices are emanating from India and Indians that Taiwan must remain as it is now.

Significantly, in what considered a first of its kind, three former service chiefs, General Manoj Naravane, Admiral Karambir Singh and Air Chief Marshal R.K.S. Bhadauria, attended a defence and security dialogue seminar on Indo-Pacific organised by the Taiwan foreign ministry - the Seventh Ketagalan Forum—2023 Indo-Pacific Security Dialogue at the Grand Hyatt, Taipei on August 8, 2023.[8] While the former Chiefs went to Taipei as private citizens, that in no way dilutes the significance that they were the senior most military officials of India until very recently and they were in Taipei on invitation by the Taiwanese foreign ministry. At the conference, Admiral Singh dwelt on the present global security scenario and the importance of the Taiwan Strait situation to India and the world. He highlighted that Chinese "belligerence and intimidatory use of hard power" leaves India disconcerted and that "New Delhi does not want the Chinese playbook replicated elsewhere as it is in the South China Sea".[9] It is to be also noted that India's Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Gen. Anil Chauhan has asked the three services to come up with suggestions and options for India in the event of a full-blown crisis in the Cross-Strait.[10]

Indian officials privately say that if the US and its allies support Taiwan against China, India may be asked by Washington to help in refuelling its jets. As it is, India and the US have signed a Logistics-Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) to support each other in case of need. LEMOA gives access to designated military facilities on either side for refuelling and replenishment. Other areas in the agreement's ambit include food, water, billeting, transportation, petroleum, oils, lubricants, clothing, communication services, medical services, storage services, training services, spare parts and components, repair and maintenance services and calibration services between the two nations.

However, one wishes that such a situation of India fueling US jets for rescuing Taiwan will not arise. As has been pointed out, the world is not prepared for a situation that disturbs the status quo in Taiwan. As Prime Minister Modi has said, it is time for "I(ndia)T(aiwan) linkage to gain more and more strength. And that is possible as long as Taiwan remains stable, liberal and democratic.

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Managing Global Commons:
Challenges and Responses in the IOR

RS Vasan*

Introduction

With over seventy percent of the globe being the oceans, the useable portions of the seas that can be harnessed in the maritime domain has been designated as the global commons. The term itself has a connotation that it belongs to the humanity transcending both natural and artificial borders. With the increased use, indispensability and dependence of oceans, the inherent challenges stare at all nations in this century of the seas.

Implicit in the term "global commons" is the recognition of both the ownership of the common space in which resources can be extracted in sustained environment friendly manner and the responsibility that comes with any ownership. A lot of the ideas did flourish from the concept of Mare Liberum[1] espoused by Grotious in the 17th century. This also demands both the collective and the individual actions to comply with the rules for conduct in the global commons. Rules of conduct as agreed by the global community by collective conscience and understanding needs to be monitored implemented and enforced by those empowered and equipped to deal with violations whenever necessary.

The maritime global commons, encompassing the world's oceans and seas including the airspace above, play a crucial role in supporting global trade, facilitating communication, and fostering environmental sustainability. Monitoring and regulating the activities in and of the global commons requires international cooperation for mounting surveillance and for sharing information of happenings in the areas of common interests. The examination of many incidents such as piracy, Illegal Unreported and Unregulated fishing (IUU), acts of terrorism, marine pollution and accidents on the high seas bring out the acute challenges faced by surveillance assets deployed for monitoring and Law Enforcement Agencies across board. On one hand, there are huge unmonitored areas where some of the illegal activities are taking place and on the other hand, there are issues of overlapping/contested areas of jurisdiction which pose considerable challenges to the nations more so with overlapping areas of responsibility. There can be no second opinion about the desired need to utilise capacity, and capability of the countries to play a crucial part in managing the common heritage of mankind.

This paper aims to explore and examine the

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range of issues associated with managing the maritime global commons. The compulsions for maritime nations and global institutions such as the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and the United Nations to adopt certain strategies to ensure the responsible and equitable use of these vital resources would need to be studied in detail. IMO in particular has been spearheading all issues related to safety at sea and also regulations related to Marine Pollution.[2] The challenges of managing the global commons in the Indian Ocean Region and the possible responses by the stake holders in the region will also be examined.

Indian Ocean

This ocean is the third largest ocean in the world. Occupying about twenty percent of the ocean space, it has become the hub of global maritime activity. The oceanic space includes Andaman Sea, Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, Gulf of Aden, Great Australian Bight, Gulf of Oman, Laccadive Sea and the Mozambique Channel. These have been the connectivity nodes for nations across continents and house the established sea lines of communication (SLOCs) since times immemorial. Some of the recent developments in the Indian Ocean are illustrated[3] in the recent Carnegie Endowment for international Peace article by Darshana Barua.

Even in the past, the European powers made inroads in to the subcontinent through the sea routes and established colonial rule. The Dutch, French, Portuguese partially and finally the British were able to establish full control over India and rule the country for more than 250 years. It is also undisputed that it was the maritime trade that followed the flag in all these cases signifying the importance of oceans for trade which provided ample opportunity for the subsequent colonisation on the premise of providing security, stability and prosperity.

UNCLOS 1982

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is the most important document that has stood the test of time since its acceptance way back in 1982 by the comity of nations. While there may be certain provisions that do not cater for the emerging nature of maritime challenges, with advent of newer technology, by and large, the desired conduct of the nations in governing the seas and the activity have been well defined. The salient's of the conventions are well documented[4] and by and large have been well understood by the global community. However, both USA which has not ratified the treaty and China which has ratified the treaty, have chosen to interpret the clauses to their respective advantage. The USA has been carrying out the Freedom of Navigation (FON) operations where it interprets the claims of the sovereign countries as "excessive". In the case of India, the Maritime Zones of India Act that was promulgated in 1976 has references to India's claims including in the Exclusive Economic Zone wherein the nature of operations that can be conducted or prohibited have been specified. India also has notified that the movement of warships more so if it also involves firing of weapons etc. needs to be notified by the concerned nation. USA does not recognise this notification and the most recent incident of

the units of 7th fleet movements in the EEZ was not notified till its occurrence straining the otherwise excellent relations[5]. US naval forces have also been carrying out regular FONOPs in the SCS[6] and it has drawn criticism from the analysts in China.[7]

China on its part has chosen to ignore the verdict of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA)[8] which supported the claims of Philippines. Not only has China not accepted the verdict, but has been aggressive in its intent and actions in asserting its fishing claims in disputed areas of its neighbours. These accentuate the challenges of ocean governance and rule. While a lot of emphasis is laid on Rule Based Order, the very definition of RBO has been contested as players who have not agreed to abide by such rules tend to complicate the issues of maritime security.

The issues related to the responsibility to govern territorial waters, contingent waters and the high seas have been well defined. There are tricky situations which have tested the provisions of UNCLOS, more due to convenient interpretations. Some of the sample case studies would make it clear as to how the provisions of governance get complicated. A few of the examples related to the measures initiated to control piracy in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the impact are listed below to illustrate the complexities that can arise in the global commons or the high seas despite the best intentions.

Surging Piracy incidents and Declaration of High-Risk Area (HRA): The sudden surge in piracy attacks post 2008 necessitated the promulgation of the High-Risk Area in which armed guards could be carried by merchant ships

though this is not allowed in normal times. The declaration of the HRA itself was contested as in the case of India which proved that there were no acts of piracy in an area that was declared as HRA. After much negotiation and exchange of data, this area was pushed eastwards from the India coast which changed the way in which piracy was dealt in the areas close to India. As of 01 Jan 2023, this HRA has been removed due to the number of piracy attacks in the area that was hardly visible[9]. However, this year has again witnessed a rise, not only in piracy attacks but also in use of drones by non-state actors. The Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Harikumar[10] has said that since November 2023, there have been an average of at least one attack in the Arabian sea by pirates or drones.

MV Alondra Rainbow: At the top of the shelf in the Indian context, this case of pirates who had taken over a Japanese ship carrying aluminium ingots were apprehended by a joint action of the Indian Navy and the Indian Coast Guard. However, after a protracted legal battle in different courts, the pirates were acquitted bringing out many lacunae in the outdated piracy laws of the country which depended on an Admiralty provision for prosecuting the offenders. It took some more incidents covered below for the anti-Piracy laws to be promulgated only recently[11]. The cases covered below indicate the complexities involved in managing the issues in the global commons and more specifically on the high seas.

Enrica Lexie: This was a vexed issue between India and Italy after the Italian marines who were posted on a merchant ship shot dead two fishermen off the Kerala coast in the Exclusive

Economic Zone of India on 15th February 2012, mistaking them for pirates. This case, in addition to straining the relations between the two countries brought out many issues related to anti-piracy measures and use of armed guards on merchant men[12]. The fact that Enrica Lexie was brought to Cochin and charges slapped on the vessel, its master and crew raised many legal issues. The two Italian marines were in custody and finally in addition to back door negotiations, the courts finally acquitted the marines. The issue of jurisdiction of nations beyond territorial waters and the right of vessels to be tried by the flag state were at the core of the litigation processes that went on for years.

MV Seaman Guard Ohio: In another case this vessel was acting as a floating armoury (a concept not endorsed by IMO), and was apprehended by the Indian Coast Guard off Tuticorin for violation of customs provisions (when it received fuel without paying duty) and also for carrying arms and security personnel without declaration as required by the Indian Government followed by an inspection by the LEAs. The author[13] had covered certain issues that were of great relevance to the concept of maritime security in the backdrop of unsanctioned activity in the global commons. This again got entangled in legal processes and brought out the challenges in the global commons in law enforcement. The crew were acquitted[14] after a four year long court battle. However, this did bring up the issues of security of coastal states in the absence of relevant provisions for prosecution in such cases which has the potential to affect the security.

IUU: With the dwindling stocks of fish catch around the world, and better technologies and well-equipped fishing vessels, maritime nations are investing heavily to complement their food security and also to cash on the increasing demand for fish. However, there is frequent intrusion in the EEZs of other nations bordering the high seas which has impacted the security dynamics in the region. Vessels of other nations notably Chinese are routinely engaged in poaching in the EEZ of other nations. The multiple dimensions of IUU have been well documented in the FAO document[15] which provides the background, details of international frame work, tools and initiatives, along with capacity development envisaged. In the case of the South China Sea, China has even used the maritime militia to prevent the neighbouring fishing vessels by use of threat of force. The incidents within the Philippines EEZ are illustrative of the muscle power being used by China which uses all means to prevent any fishing activity in disputed areas which it claims as its own. Except for registering protests and in some cases, warding them off in dangerous close quarter situations, the maritime world appears helpless to make China behave as a responsible maritime nation.

Blue Economy

Blue economy as a concept has been conceived as a sustainable means of harnessing the oceans through diverse components.[16] It appears to offer some options for responsible use of resources. The most pressing challenge in managing the maritime global commons is the overexploitation of its resources. Overfishing, illegal fishing practices, and the depletion of marine biodiversity due to unfair practices in the global

commons threaten the delicate ecological balance of the oceans. Addressing these issues requires coordinated efforts to enforce regulations, establish marine protected areas, and promote sustainable fishing practices.

The harnessing of the oceans always has a component of responsibility towards maintaining the necessary standards to ensure that any such activity does not result in global warming and climate change. The impact of climate change on the maritime global commons cannot be ignored. Rising sea levels, ocean acidification, and extreme weather events pose risks to coastal regions and maritime activities. Mitigating climate change requires a global commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the changing conditions.

Low lying islands and coastal states run the risk of being submerged with sea level rise due to global warming. The plight of countries such as Maldives was best highlighted by former Maldivian President Nasheed who carried out a meeting underwater on assumption of office. That picture, etched in public memory, is a strong message on the dangers of global warming.

Terrorism in and through the Global Commons

The use of sea for terror activities is nothing new. Means and methods have been refined to make it difficult for countering such acts. While the seaborne attacks by the LTTE in the ethnic war in Sri Lanka and similar attacks on USS Cole and MV Limburg brought home the potential of even small craft to cause havoc, the sea borne attacks on 26/11 in the commercial capital of India, Mumbai[17] again brought out the abuse of the global commons for state sponsored terrorist activity. The complete details have been well documented in multiple sources as it held great relevance to promoting the security dynamics in areas of interest in which neighbouring countries with adversarial relations are compelled to operate together.

The recent case of drone attacks on merchant shipping in the Red Sea is a classic example of how law-abiding merchantmen are coming under attack due to the political fallout of conflicts such as the one in Gaza that has spilled over to the sea areas that include the dense shipping traffic so vital for sustenance itself.

The maritime global commons are also susceptible to transnational security challenges such as piracy, terrorism, spying in the guise of research activities and territorial disputes. Collective security efforts are essential to deal with these challenges in the maritime domain. Naval and LEA collaborations, joint exercises, and intelligence sharing among nations can enhance the security of the maritime global commons. Diplomatic channels should also be utilised to resolve territorial disputes peacefully and avoid conflict. The compliance with the international norms and respect for RBO have been debated in the context of China's violation of the norms of behaviour with respect to its maritime neighbours with whom it has territorial disputes, more so in the overlapping areas of EEZ.

Marine Pollution

With the increased activity on the seas, the danger of pollution due to accidents, oil spillage and intentional dumping of toxic waste/plastics has become an area of great concern in the global

commons. While the MARPOL[18] (Marine Pollution) provides guidelines and actions required to contain marine pollution, it remains a challenge in the global commons due to the inability of concerned nations to monitor the large tracts of oceans where such illegal activities are taking place. Coordinated efforts by pooling in resources and data exchanges in real time and intelligence would help to control this menace.

Marine pollution caused by plastic waste, oil spills, and chemical contaminants, poses a significant threat to the health of the oceans. Managing environmental degradation necessitates the implementation of stringent regulations, investment in clean technologies, and international agreements to reduce pollution and promote conservation.

Governments and industries need to prioritise environmental conservation through the implementation of policies that reduce pollution and protect marine ecosystems. Investing in clean technologies, encouraging best shipping practices and use of renewable energy sources, can contribute to minimising the environmental footprint of maritime activities. In the G20 conducted successfully by India, the concept of One Earth, One Family and One Future[19] has been very well received by the global community as it brings out the responsibility of all the nations to work together to achieve this universal concept.

To address overexploitation, nations need to adopt sustainable resource management practices. This includes the establishment of marine protected areas, setting catch limits, and promoting responsible fishing methods and joint ventures. Investing in technology for monitoring and enforcing regulations is crucial for successful implementation.

International/Regional Cooperation and Governance

Effective management of the maritime global commons requires robust international cooperation. Nations need to embrace all opportunities to work together to establish and uphold regulations that govern activities in these shared spaces. Organisations like UNCLOS provide a framework for cooperation, and adherence to these agreements is essential for maintaining order. The regional organisations such as Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) need to be able to discuss the modalities for implementing decisions that would enable better monitoring and governance of the global commons. There is an increased need for well-established structures such as the IORA and the IONS to include the dimensions of managing the global commons. At the regional and sub regional level, many other organisations such as the BIMSTEC and QUAD also need to factor the challenges to the global commons and work to mitigate the issues of concern by collective action.

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

To address the impact of climate change, nations need to honour their commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and implementing adaptation strategies. This includes developing resilient infrastructure based on new forms of technologies, supporting research on climate change impacts, and participating in global

initiatives aimed at mitigating the effects on the oceans. The forums such as the COP 28 have a great role to play in shaping the responses of both the developing and the developed world to ensure that actions or lack of them do not lead to deterioration of the global commons. The coinage of the term One Earth, One Family and One Future during the G20 presidency of India in essence sums up the collective need to examine the issues in the global commons as that belongs to the earth as we seek to secure the future for the coming generations.

How has India fared thus far?

While the maritime security agencies viz., the Indian Navy, the Indian Coast Guard and the Coastal Security Group have evolved to meet the threats, Mumbai terror attack from the sea and some of the peace time accidents at sea have indicated that there is greater need to improve the means and methods to secure the global commons. The Mumbai terror attack brought out the porous nature of our maritime borders due to lack of intelligence sharing and for lack of coordination amongst the central and state agencies tasked with managing the marine environment.

The Coastal Security Group, though proposed post the Kargil debacle, gained traction only post the Mumbai terror attack. This did help the states to create a maritime force that could patrol the close seas along the coast in their respective states. However, it has come to light that there are still many issues to be streamlined in terms of asset maintenance, training and coordination with other agencies.

The creation of the Information Fusion Centre at the IMAC in Gurugram, Delhi has been a game changer as it allows for collation of all data from diverse sources and provides a comprehensive surface picture in areas of interest. The integration of the sub surface picture and air picture in areas of interest would only be a logistical step to have all-round awareness.

By examining the way in which India has responded to both natural and manmade disasters since independence, it can be safely said that the entire structure is evolving in a promising manner. The shortage of vessels and surveillance means is being made up by both indigenous programmes, adoption of newer technology including AI and also imports, where necessary, to fill in the gap. The Mumbai terror attack, while a shocker that claimed innocent lives, paved the way to review and revamp the entire maritime security structure to prevent such surprises at sea.

Conclusion

Effectively managing the maritime global commons is a shared responsibility that requires sub-regional, regional and international collaboration. Such formal and informal associations need to work to implement sustainable practices, and be committed to environmental stewardship by identified ownership based on location and strengths.

By addressing challenges such as overexploitation, security concerns, environmental degradation, and climate change, nations can ensure the long-term health and sustainability of the oceans for current and future generations. A collective effort is essential to strike a balance between economic interests, security considerations, and environmental preservation in the maritime global commons.

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Bringing the Indian Ocean Back into the Indo-Pacific Discourse

Don McLain Gill*

The emergence of the Indo-Pacific construct, the attempt to amalgamate the Indian and Pacific Oceans into a single strategic region, has generated considerable recognition among scholars and policymakers given the geopolitical heft the geographic space carries. The Indo-Pacific is arguably the most dynamic region composed of states with varied interests, threat perceptions, and concerns. The region is largely characterised by the intensification of major power politics on the one hand and the increasing levels of economic and technological inter-dependence on the other. However, despite the attempts to deepen the integration between both significant oceans, there seems to be a stark imbalance in strategic discourses, which largely favours the security dynamics of the Pacific.

Nevertheless, several practical and objective reasons exist behind the dominance of the Pacific Ocean in Indo-Pacific geopolitical discourse. There is a general consensus among scholars in and out of the region about how the ongoing power competition between the United States and China marks the defining structural characteristics of the Indo-Pacific.[1] Regarding geographical represen-tations, China is an East Asian power, while the US projects itself as a Pacific power. Moreover, while the Pacific Ocean traditionally fell within Washington's sphere of influence, China's rise as a potential great power further compromises US interests and influence in the geographic space.

Beyond the fluctuations in power between the two states, there is also a stark contrast in perception and ambitions. While Washington seeks to secure and maintain the post-Second World War rules-based order, China's revisionist and expansionist ambitions in the Western Pacific continue to provoke the stability of the established order. For instance, China's abrasive militarisation of the South China Sea not only shows its disregard for international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the 2016 Arbitral Ruling but also continues to trample on the sovereignty and sovereign rights of the Southeast Asian claimant states.[2] Furthermore, aside from the South China Sea, the Western Pacific contains other contentious flashpoints for conflict: the Korean Peninsula, the East China Sea, and the Taiwan Strait.

Given this reality, a proliferation of security arrangements emerged between like-minded states with a particular emphasis on securing the rules-based order, particularly in the Western Pacific. These include the Quad between the US, Japan, Australia and India; a trilateral between Australia, US, and the United Kingdom (AUKUS); an emerging four-way arrangement between the US, Japan, Australia, and the Philippines; and a reinvigorated trilateral between the US, Japan, and South Korea. What is interesting to note is how

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the US maintains a constant presence in all arrangements, given its material preponderance and traditional position as the Pacific Ocean's net security provider. However, Washington's view of the Indo-Pacific remains largely asymmetrical vis-à-vis the Indian Ocean.

It is interesting to note how the 2017 US National Security Strategy geographically defined the Indo-Pacific, encompassing the west coast of India to the western shores of the United States.[3] This is a concerning scope given that it neglects the highlight of the critical Western Indian Ocean Region at a time when states like India, Japan, and France included the entirety of the Indian Ocean until the eastern coast of Africa. However, under the Joe Biden-led administration, the Indian Ocean was recognised as an essential component of Washington's Indo-Pacific strategy. However, the strategy stopped short of providing a more comprehensive conceptualisation of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). At the same time, the document highlighted the multiple sub-regions of the Pacific (Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania, including the Pacific Islands), while only South Asia was mentioned in the Indian Ocean.[4] Here, it is notable how essential and strategic sub-regions of the IOR were overlooked.

However, while it is understandable for the US alliance network to focus more on the Pacific for palpable reasons, as mentioned above, the emerging security challenges in the Indian Ocean necessitate a necessary rethink between like-minded states. Therefore, to put the current dynamics of the IOR into perspective, it is first essential to provide context about the region's significance. The Indian Ocean accounts for one-third of the world's bulk cargo traffic, two-thirds of the world's oil shipments, and around 35 percent of the world's population. The Indian Ocean economy is also expected to account for over 20 percent of the global GDP in 2025.[5] Moreover, the IOR includes major energy-exporting and importing sub-regions, including Southeast Asia, South Asia, West Asia, and Eastern and Southern Africa. However, despite its geo-economic and geopolitical significance, the Indian Ocean remains fragmented and riddled with states that share considerable vulnerabilities and insecurities. Additionally, unlike the coalition-driven dynamics of the Pacific, the IOR needs concerted efforts among regional powers to maintain peace and security. As a result, the Indian Ocean has been ripe for exploitation among state and non-state actors, thus compromising the legitimacy and status of the international rules-based order.

Unfolding Challenges in the Indian Ocean

The most recent of these challenges is the ongoing attack of Yemen-based Houthi militants on commercial vessels transiting through the vital trade routes of the Indian Ocean. Since the Houthi attacks, Western navies have also engaged in the maritime domain to repel the drones and missiles being launched from Yemen. Such activities have been exacerbating the security and economic conditions of the IOR. For instance, the Bab-al-Mandeb strait, connecting Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, carries approximately 13 per cent of the world's trade by volume. Compromising the free flow of goods in these waters will adversely impact the global economy's health. Additionally,

as the crisis continues to exacerbate, major shipping companies decided to either cease or redirect operations from the Red Sea, increasing insurance costs for vessels and adding a notable inflationary impact on the fragile global economy.[6]

Beyond the threats posed by non-state actors, the IOR also faces traditional state-led security challenges. The assertive rise of China continues to provoke the volatile conditions of the international rules-based order. While its expansionist manoeuvres in the Western Pacific are known, its activities in the Indian Ocean are less talked about but equally controversial. Generally, Beijing's increasing interest in the IOR can be generally explained by its increasing energy needs - 70 per cent of China's oil and LNG imports pass through the Indian Ocean. However, a close look at Beijing's activities illustrates a bid for power projection and dominance at the expense of the status-quo security architecture.

China's "Two Oceans" strategy aims to exercise control and influence over the Pacific and Indian Oceans.[7] While its ambitions in the Pacific are directly confronted by a series of coalitions and alliances between like-minded democracies, the IOR maintains a considerable power vacuum that it seeks to present as an opportunity for Beijing to exploit. Therefore, since 2008, China has incorporated a series of dual-use strategies that aimed to forge closer commercial ties with fragile or economically constrained regional states for geopolitical ends. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) provides access to crucial mega infrastructure projects like ports and highways from the Eastern to the Western Indian Ocean. While infrastructure development is crucial for regional growth, Chinese projects have been marred with non-transparent and corrupt financing and investment agreements, thus adding more burden to regional states.[8] Already having an offshore military base in Djibouti, China intends to acquire favourable leverage to compel its IOR partners into narrowly driven political and military arrangements to constrain India's traditional leadership role and block the expansion of US naval activities.[9]

Such activities will likely add more tension to the already tumultuous security dynamic of the IOR, leading to consequential global implications. Therefore, given the apparent importance of Indian Ocean geopolitics, it is crucial to embed its status in mainstream Indo-Pacific narratives and discourses deeply. However, a policy reorientation among like-minded and materially influential Indo-Pacific states is necessary to achieve such parity in recognition between both oceans.

Possible Recommendations

Among the most critical steps to better integrate the Indian Ocean in contemporary Indo-Pacific policy discourse is through institutional cooperation. Accordingly, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) is the premier regional institution in the IOR that aims to enhance cooperation within the region. The IORA has members and dialogue partners covering Africa, West Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, Australia, North America, and Europe. However, its relevance in Indo-Pacific discourses remains marginal despite the size of its scope. However, a significant development occurred with the institution's adoption of the IORA's outlook on the

Indo-Pacific (IOIP) in 2022, paving the way for a more integrated role in Indo-Pacific geopolitics.[10]

However, more must be done to position the IORA not only as a primary Indian Ocean organisation but also as a lynchpin institution for Indo-Pacific states from both oceans to cooperate more effectively in the IOR amidst emerging threats. The IORA's revitalised focus on maritime security cooperation coincides with overarching goal of like-minded states to keep the Indo-Pacific free, open, inclusive, and rules-based.[11] Therefore, it will be necessary to maximise the participation of like-minded Indo-Pacific states within the IORA to facilitate and influence policy measures in the already tumultuous IOR. In fact, despite being a non-Indian Ocean state, China has deepened its participation in major IOR institutions, including the IORA, the Indian Ocean Commission, and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium. Thus, it will be vital for like-minded Indo-Pacific partners to balance and check China's growing influence in such sub-regional organisations.

Beyond institutional cooperation, the need for a consistent and stabilising security arrangement in the IOR among like-minded partners is of great importance to the Indian Ocean's stability and order amidst emerging traditional and non-traditional threats. While India is part of the Quad, the arrangement's focus remains mainly in the Pacific. In 2020, however, with Australia joining the Malabar Naval Exercise, all four Quad states conducted three out of five exercises in the Indian Ocean Region. Despite its significance, there needs to be a more concerted and consistent effort from the Quad to operate more frequently in the IOR. However, while such policy reorientation may take time, it will be necessary for India, the sole resident Indian Ocean power in the Quad, to forge complementary alternatives in the IOR.

The foundations of such an emerging security arrangement were laid out in 2021, with talks on establishing a France-India-Australia trilateral centred on maritime security.[12] All three states have large stakes and interests in the IOR. While India is a resident IOR power, France and Australia also have territories in the region. France's Reunion and Mayotte and Australia's Cocos and Christmas islands are all strategically located in the Indian Ocean. Additionally, France also maintains a resident military presence of 2,000 troops, five naval units, and four aircraft; on the other hand, Australia has one post in Mauritius.[13] Nevertheless, all three states have the potential to concentrate their efforts on the IOR. For instance, India, France, and Australia can shore up critical infrastructure security in the Indian Ocean, such as undersea cables. Additionally, while the reach of the Indian and French militaries in the IOR is greater, Australia's support will be crucial, given that all three states have military logistics agreements with one another. Therefore, establishing regular joint patrols and naval exercises to improve interoperability and maritime domain awareness will be a significant contribution towards keeping the IOR open, free, inclusive, and rules-based. Furthermore, a France-India-Australia trilateral will provide more diplomatic diversity in providing public good in the region. Fortunately, the momentum is growing for this trilateral arrangement, with the 2024 India-France joint statement emphasising how the France-India-Australia trilateral is a much-needed cornerstone in the region.[14] Therefore, the

Quad's focus in the Pacific will be complemented by the France-India-Australia trilateral's focus in the IOR, making the potential for synergies even greater.

Conclusion

While the rise of the Indo-Pacific construct is undeniable, it remains primarily centred on the Pacific Ocean due to the intensifying US-China power competition in East and Southeast Asia. However, it is essential to equally underscore how the IOR's exacerbating security conditions can lead to negative spillovers throughout the greater Indo-Pacific and the rest of the world. This is mainly due to various emerging traditional and non-traditional security issues left unchecked for several years. Therefore, the need for like-minded Indo-Pacific powers to reorient and even diversify their approaches towards the IOR will be crucial for preserving the rules-based order in the greater region, given the highly interdependent security dynamics between both oceans. However, for a successful reorientation, consistency and far-sightedness will be necessary.

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Indian Ocean: Building A Peaceful Region

Shekhar Sinha*

At the Indian Ocean Conference held in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Dr Ram Madhav, President, India Foundation, while speaking during the curtain raiser of the conference on 12 May 2023, emphasised the geo-economic and geo-political importance of the region. Clearly, the two form inseparable links, and their relationship and inter-dependence on each other are more relevant today than ever before. In less than a year since the last conference, the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) which seemed calm, stable and in the process of recovering from economic downslide post Covid, has turned into a playground of the great game, akin to the past.

In the same conference, while delivering the Keynote address, India's External Affairs Minister (EAM), Dr S Jaishankar, made very significant remarks, pointing out that Indian Ocean nations had distinctive issues arising from colonial experiences and geo-political relationship and their presence in the larger domain of Indo-Pacific, called for a more focused approach towards these nations' challenges. Today, we find ourselves faced with geo-political challenges which have a direct impact on geo-economics, proving the EAM right in pointing out the two aspects of stability in the IOR.

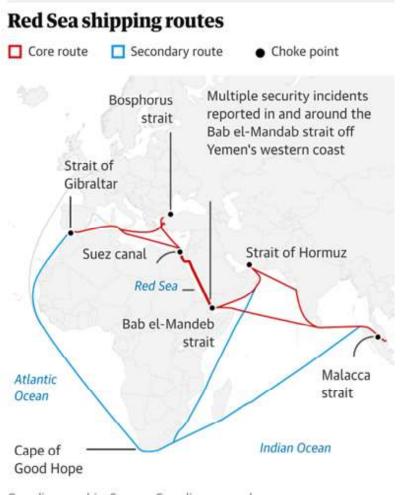The Russia-Ukraine conflict may appear to be an Eurasian confrontation, but its fallout has been more impactive on IOR littorals by way of increase in oil prices. Majority of the littorals are middle to low-income countries and increase in energy prices tend to increase the gap between rich and the poor. While this has caused considerable damage to the IOR economy, the impact of the Israel-Hamas episode, which began on 7 October 2023 and which does not seem to terminate, is multiplying the economic woes. Why is West Asia conflict impacting IOR littorals again?

World's 12% trade passes through Suez Canal and is accessed by vessels travelling from Asia via the 30 km wide Bab-el-Mandeb strait. About half of this freight is made up of containerised goods. This route also provides a vital passage for shipment of oil from Gulf to Europe and North America. Rerouting shipments around the Cape of Good Hope adds approximately 3000-3500 nautical miles (6000 kms) to journeys connecting Europe with Asia, which adds approximately 10 days to the passage.

The IOR is the backbone of world trade. Some figures will be self-explanatory. The GDP growth rate of Indian Ocean countries has been higher than other developing areas. Additionally, the population of the region is likely to exceed 2.1 billion by 2030 and a major portion of this large population

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will be young, having a median age of 29.6 years. Therefore, the economic growth can be supported by this young population.

The sea lanes in the Indian Ocean consist of largest number of routes for trade and energy flows, which are the driving force for all economic activity. An estimated 160,000 vessels including crude oil tankers, LNG tankers and container ships traverse each year in the Indian Ocean. The energy resources transported to Asian countries and the world are vital to the economy, particularly Asian countries which are growing at a much faster rate than many other regions of the world. Nearly 80% of the world's oil tankers sail through the Indian Ocean negotiating three choke points, Straits of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb and Straits of Malacca. There is continuing increase in crude oil transportation and it is predicted that it will increase to approximately 44.6 million barrel per day by 2040. Therefore, the region and the choke points become strategically important not only to China but also to the major economies of the Indo-Pacific. Thus, the routes and choke points are important collective economy in its own right and therefore collective responsibility of not only nations of IOR but entire Indo-Pacific. For flowing economic growth, it is essential to keep the region stable with peaceful security environment. It cannot be achieved by one country or only by cooperation within IOR countries, but would need cooperation from other countries in the world also. This is indispensable.

Unfortunately, stability is frequently disturbed by number of security breach incidents. Activities such as piracy, armed robbery, terrorist attacks, drug trafficking, illegal fishing, fall out of conflicts over

Red Sea shipping routes

□ Core route   □ Secondary route   ● Choke point

Multiple security incidents reported in and around the Bab el-Mandab strait off Yemen's western coast

Bosphorus strait
Strait of Gibraltar
Suez canal
Strait of Hormuz
Red Sea
Bab el-Mandeb strait
Atlantic Ocean
Malacca strait
Cape of Good Hope
Indian Ocean

Guardian graphic. Source: Guardian research

land spilling to seas (such as recent Houthi attacks on traffic through Red Sea/Bab-el-Mandeb opening up to Arabian Sea), have all threatened the security in the IOR. This has led to most shipping companies choosing longer routes, rounding the Cape of Good Hope (as has been depicted in the diagram). Increased cost and transit time will impact oil prices and in-turn the economy on account of higher prices and inflation. Recently, there was piracy/hijacking attempt in the Arabian Sea which was thwarted by timely arrival of Indian Navy Destroyer, P8 I Maritime aircraft and MQ 9 UAV and aggressive action by Indian Navy marine commandoes.

Then there is increasing geopolitical contest between China and the US world over. This contestation is both, geo-economic and techno-politics, which is visible in the Indo-Pacific, especially in the IOR, this being strategically very important. PLA Navy ships and submarines are present in the IOR, most times under the anti-piracy pretext. China has also increased influence and reconnaissance operations which is often resisted by the USN ships. Impact of terrorism over land is spilling over to the sea. The presence of multiple navies operating in the same space, risks escalation into conflict. Their presence has already begun to destabilise the IOR. Ships forced to take longer routes leads to higher insurance and transit costs. It does not augur well for security and stability for peaceful trade and commerce which is detrimental to development of IOR littorals. Once the friction escalates into conflict, the developing countries in the region could be severely impacted. This calls for all regional countries to cooperate in securing the sea lanes of communication. The action would call for diplomatic and naval initiatives. The littorals have to be better prepared rather than taking sides in this geopolitical contestation and make situation complex for ourselves.

Towards this goal, the Colombo Conclave is a good initiative. The security set up of IOR littorals should come together to ensure safe and timely transit/arrival of public goods to/from IOR ports. Apart from diplomatic and political efforts, hard power is needed for ensuring stable Indian Ocean for trade.

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Towards a Stable and Sustainable Indian Ocean

Rishan de Silva*

Geopolitical Cartographer

In June 2023, the Geopolitical Cartographer[1] facilitated a discussion between President Ranil Wickremesinghe and the former Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper, at the 40th anniversary of the International Democratic Union. Later that month, we presented on 'Freedom of Navigation and Security Cooperation' in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) at the East Asia Marine Cooperation Platform in Qingdao, China. In August, we collaborated with the embassy of Thailand in Sri Lanka on 'Revising Southeast Asia Links Suvarnabhumi Tambralinga and Tambapanni', and the historical connection between peoples. In September 2023, we hosted a panel discussion with Hon. Sagala Ratnayaka, the Chief of Staff to the President, and the Foreign Secretary as the moderator, as well as representation from the High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka, H.E. Gopal Baglay, and ambassadors of China, Japan, and France, where each envoy detailed the Indian Ocean aspects of Sri Lanka's high-level visits. We then facilitated an event for President Ranil Wickremesinghe, to speak at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace's Island's Dialogue on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly.

In October 2023, the Geopolitical Cartographer's collaboration with the Sri Lanka Navy in hosting the Galle Dialogue 2023 came to fruition, with its theme 'Emerging New Order in the Indian Ocean', where we hosted Dr. Ram Madhav, President of the India Foundation and others, to join in the deliberations and discussions. The Galle Dialogue took place at the Lighthouse Hotel in Galle soon after Sri Lanka assumed the Chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and we were able to introduce a new plenary session on the theme, and naval panels which included representatives from India, US, China, Pakistan, Japan and the UK, addressing the issues of our time. Think tanks, academics, NGO's and other organisations also contributed to making this edition of the Galle Dialogue a success. This was followed soon after by a dinner event hosted by the Geopolitical Cartographer, where the Founder and Patron, President Wickremesinghe; Co-Patron and former President and Speaker of the Maldives, Mohamed Nasheed; President of the India Foundation, Dr. Ram Madhav; and leading maritime professor, Geoffrey Till, all spoke about varying issues in the Indian Ocean Region. Later in October, the Geopolitical Cartographer attended a sideline event of the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing, China.

The Geopolitical Cartographer also attended the BRICS+ think tank meetings across four cites in China, and in November we presented on 'Bay of Bengal Maritime Security' at the Naval 'Seapower Conference' in Australia. We later collaborated with the French Embassy in Sri Lanka for a dinner where our international advisory

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council member, Mr. Erik Solheim spoke on 'Environmental Security in the Indian Ocean'. As we have entered 2024, the geopolitical cartography of the IOR continues to face challenges and opportunities and so we are once again honoured to attend the Indian Ocean Conference, this time in Perth, Australia. 2024 has been dubbed the year of elections, with many countries inside and out of the IOR facing elections, with Maldives and Egypt already having theirs at the end of last year, and this year we have already had the elections of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Taiwan, and Finland. While the world will be watching closely as India and the US have elections, in our region Pakistan, Indonesia, South Africa, and Sri Lanka all face elections.

Towards a Stable and Sustainable Indian Ocean

While a semblance of normalcy was restored to our region towards the end of the year in terms of the economy, the IOR continues to witness tumultuous changes. Following the increases in government spending after the COVID-19 pandemic, our region continues to be affected by the ongoing 'Russia- Ukraine' war, with its spillover effects on fuels, grains, and fertilisers, affecting the cost of living and inflation across the region. In June 2023, under the invitation from President Macron of France, President Wickremesinghe attended the 'Summit for a New Global Financing Pact' in Paris, where, in meetings with the managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Kristalina Georgieva, and the United States Secretary of the Treasury, Janet Yellen, among others, he called for increased financing options for Least Developed Countries (LDC's)

and Middle-Income Countries (MIC's). President Wickremesinghe stated that because of the economic crisis and the need to adhere to climate targets, Sri Lanka has had to raise double the financing required at a time when limited financing was available for development. To move toward a less polluted world would require around USD 2 trillion/year in financing for the next 7 to 10 years. However, despite the presence of agencies like the World Bank and the IMF, the commitment made at the summit was only around the level of USD 100 billion/year. How do we, as developing and emerging countries, bridge this financing gap? Additionally, the requirements for reforms by multilateral lending institutions, are often politically unfavourable, and ahead of election cycles, implementing such reforms could jeopardise the sustainability of such programmes, let alone the Government's which are willing to work with such institutions. In a move to reduce tensions between the two biggest economies, the Secretary of the Treasury visited China in July and reiterated calls for support of developing nations.

In August, the world witnessed as the BRICS countries of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa all met in South Africa and created a roadmap for four Indian Ocean Countries (Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Iran) to join the grouping, as well as Ethiopia. Discussions would soon follow over whether this expanded grouping would be able to provide an alternate financial regime to the current dollarised international financial architecture "as a means of reducing their vulnerability to dollar exchange rate fluctuations"[2]. In September 2023, President Wickremesinghe emphasised the importance of Sri Lanka's place in the Indian Ocean at the Islands

Dialogue, stating that "today our priorities are not the same as that of the big powers and others in the region, whether it be the Indian Ocean or whether it be the South Pacific islands, our priorites are different: Economic, Social, Ecological. We are prepared to work with any actors, state or non-state actors, who will help us to achieve this objective". He went on to say "we feel that the Sino-US rivalry is something that started in the Western Pacific, the structured area of 'Asia-Pacfic' and it still functions; they all meet, you have APEC, and while it's going on, its spread out now to the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific. Why we are getting pulled into it, is difficult for us to understand... just because we are strategic does not mean we are involved in any military alliances"[3] President Wickremesinghe emphasised that the 'Indo-Pacific' is still an artificial framework... for instance for some people 'Indo-Pacific' ends on the western boundary of India, others take it on to Africa, some end with Western Pacific, others go to South Pacific, now what is this 'Indo-Pacific'? I live there... I have seen China and the US taking on India and Russia, now I am seeing US and India taking on Russia and China, and you're trying to find an excuse to bring all of us in". President Wickremesinghe also stated that "the whole issue of the global debt and the low-income countries, has to be resolved in the next few years"[4]. While little has been committed to international development, the costs of the war between Russia and Ukraine continues to accrue, with some suggesting that the total cost could exceed USD 10 trillion over the next decade, when accumulating the cost on both the side of Ukraine and its allies, and Russia[5].

This was further compounded on October 7th, 2023, when Hamas attacked Israeli civilians spurring a unified retaliation against Gaza from Israel, with the unquestioned support from their major allies. At the dinner event after the Galle Dialogue, President Ranil Wickremesinghe and Professor Geoffrey Till both cautioned what could happen to the IOR because of the repercussions of the conflict. While the initial attack in this case was by Hamas, it did not take long for the narrative to be positioned as the 'Israel-Hamas War', as Israel targeted Hamas hideouts in Gaza, beneath and among civilian locations, resulting in significant civilian casualties. This was quite different from the 'Russia-Ukraine War' where Russia was positioned as having committed the first act of invasion. Meanwhile, Germans were taken aback as communities in Berlin and other areas celebrated the attack on Israel on October 7th[6]. The effects of this were felt more in the geopolitical realm, as the countries in the region soon started positioning themselves according to their allegiances. Similarly, many countries including Sri Lanka, witnessed protests from their ethnic Muslim communities against the unabated retaliation from Israel. At the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing, China, the United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Gutierrez called for a cessation to this war in Gaza and for food and aid access for the vulnerable, which had been ceased.

President Wickremesinghe spoke at the Belt and Road Forum on the 'Green Silk Road for Harmony with Nature' stating that "though Sri Lanka's emissions are globally negligible amounting to merely 0.03%, our targets for 2030 is to achieve 14.5% reduction of GHG emissions, 70% of electricity generation through renewable resources, 32% of forest cover, weaning off of

coal power by 2042, and reaching net-zero (carbon neutrality) by 2050". However, in addressing this he stated there is not enough research and coordination, nor a focal point, "therefore Sri Lanka is initiating the establishment of the International Climate Change University (ICCU), a central hub for addressing climate challenges which will serve as the nexus for 1) inter-disciplinary research, 2) knowledge dissemination, 3) hands-on education". He emphasised that amidst the economic crisis, Sri Lanka has decided to move for a green transformation and a green economy, with potential in the Mannar basin for 40-60 GigaWatts of green hydrogen through solar and wind. He stated that the implementation of Sri Lanka's Climate Prosperity Plan "requires USD 26.5 billion up to 2030, while the roadmap for carbon neutrality requires USD 100 billion" up to 2050, stating that the resources of the Belt and Road Initiative should be mobilised to help reach these objectives. He called for 1) debt-relief for Low Income Countries, 2) a window for concessionary financing for the Middle-Income Countries, 3) additional financing to be mobilised by multilateral banks. He also spoke on the tropical belt, "housing 80% of the planets terrestrial species, and over half of the worlds coral reefs and mangroves" He stated that "the natural capital of the tropical belt has a vast potential for green growth transformation", calling for the members of both the United Nations and the Belt and Road Initiative to invest in this region.

In November, we saw a return to high-level interactions between the United States and China at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in San Francisco, with President Joseph Biden meeting his counterpart, President Xi Jingping on the side-lines of this conference,

assuaging rising geopolitical uncertainties. However, later in November, the Yemen-based Houthi militia began targeting commercial vessels on the Red Sea, thereby bringing even more complexity to the Red Sea, and the Gulf of Suez and Bab-el-Mandeb choke points. This would force commercial vessels to move around the South of Africa, thereby increasing shipping costs, with a direct impact on the cost of living for those of us in the Indian Ocean Region[7]. The need for more calls for cessation of war and a return to peace, could not be louder, especially in a year where many elections are scheduled to take place. Additionally, it has been proven numerous times before that increased economic growth can only take place in a more equitable space when there are less distortions to the marketplace, like those created by conflict. For decades, Sri Lanka's growth was hampered by internal conflict, and the surrounding countries were able to surpass the trajectory envisioned for Ceylon at independence due to the ongoing conflict. The same applies on an international level.

In addressing the previous economic crisis of 2021-2022, following the preliminary restructuring deal with the Export-Import Bank of China, in early November the United States International Development Finance Corporation lent USD 553 million to the development of the West Container Terminal at the Colombo Port, which is jointly owned by Adani Group, John Keells Holdings, and the Sri Lanka Ports Authority[8]. Sri Lanka met its targets for the IMF programme in December of 2023, thereby releasing a second tranche of funding from the multilateral lending institution, this was accompanied by other financing arrangements from multilateral lending institutions like the World Bank[9]

and Asian Development Bank[10].

In Davos, Switzerland, at a side-line event of the World Economic Forum, President Wickremesinghe announced that Sri Lanka now has a primary surplus in its balance of payments, and interest rates and inflation have now come down. This represents a dramatic turnaround for our island paradise since the economic crisis, which left the country bankrupt. This presented an exciting opportunity for investment for many who were present at the Forum, and once again Sri Lanka is open for business in a time where there is increased geopolitical uncertainty.

So how do we move toward a stable and sustainable Indian Ocean Region? It is important that our region works together more closely than ever before to understand one another and the Indian Ocean. While there are increased calls to join new groupings, our region has traded with each other for millennia, which means interconnected history, ideas, and expectations from the future. At the 19th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and the G77+China Summit which recently concluded in Kampala, Uganda in January, President Wickremesinghe stated that the world is facing a multitude of challenges. He called for reforms in the global financial architecture as the Paris Club and London Club no longer dominate global debt resolution, and in mitigating climate change, stating that the "rules for the game should be decided in multilateral forums and not one or two capital cities". This Indian Ocean Conference in Perth enables us to come together to understand our shared heritage and great connector, the Indian Ocean, and learn more from one another about what brings our region together. It is only through understanding one another better that we can build on our existing relationships and move toward greater economic and cultural integration, while insulating our region from external shocks.

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Interview with H.E. Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, President of Sri Lanka

Shekhar Sinha*

Shekhar Sinha: Excellency, thank you very much for giving us time to just pose a few questions. Yesterday, you made a very strong pitch, warning that the intense geopolitical competition in the region has the possibility of spilling over into the Indian Ocean. You also expressed concern over what is happening in West Asia. In your opinion, what are the chances of this spilling over, and can the Indian Ocean region remain a zone of peace in this kind of situation.

Ranil Wickremesinghe: Indian Ocean must remain a zone of peace. What has happened in my view on the situation in West Asia is because of the American backing of the war in Gaza and the bombing. It is not American's backing Israel, which everyone expects, and which America does. But because of the US backing for the Gaza war, which has created a lot of prejudice and antagonism against the US, especially amongst the Indian Ocean littorals, where you have the Islamic countries all the way down to Indonesia. The popular reaction is against the US. Now, even if the governments want to maintain close cooperation, it may not be possible for a few years. Remember, few years count a lot in geopolitics. Two years is big in geopolitics, so that's really going to be an issue for the US. Secondly, as I said, the West tried to break Russia economically, but Russia has succeeded in coming into the Indian Ocean.

They already had a good relationship with India, which is continuing and they now have a strong relationship with China. They also have good relations with a lot of other countries in the region, especially with Iran, and they have come into the Bay of Bengal. So, in a way, America has brought Russia in here, and they have created antagonism against themselves. China has been there anyway, and Iran is also active. So, it's going to be difficult. For the US, especially this year, which is the election year, they can't be very active. So, two years out with antagonism when the new administration comes or the present administration changes its policy. And two-three years can have a big impact. As Harold Wilson said, "one week is a long time in politics."

Shekhar Sinha: So that brings me to the next question. How can countries in the IOR, the immediate littorals, keep out of this great power competition?

Ranil Wickremesinghe: I think we have all got to agree on some basics and we've worked it. This does not mean that great powers should not be there in the Indian Ocean. Like India, they have to be in the ocean, and they will be there, and they are taking part in exercises like against the Somali pirates. But basically, we must agree on the freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean and how we control great power rivalry in the area.

His Excellency Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe is the President of Sri Lanka.

Vice Admiral (Retd.) Shekhar Sinha is the Chairman of Board of Trustees, India Foundation.

India and Sri Lanka especially have been very active from the 1940s, from the time of independence. Other countries, like South Africa, I think we can talk to them. You can also talk with countries like the US, China and all others. If we agree, then others have to fall in line. We are not saying don't be there, don't have your bases. China has bases. Japan has one base. You can't say no to them. America has one in Asia, but we have to control what happens.

Shekhar Sinha: Do you recommend that our immediate 4-6 countries who are impacted by this geopolitical competition or likely to be impacted, should have a consensus generating mechanism?

Ranil Wickremesinghe: We should have a consensus generating mechanism, I think, for three things: political issues, trade and for ecology, which is a big issue now.

Shekhar Sinha: Do you envision something like an EU type of parliament?

Ranil Wickremesinghe: I do not think we need to have an EU type of model, but there can be understandings and agreements. I can't see Indian Ocean countries forming a parliament of that nature. It is just too big. I mean basically, we have very big numbers. We have India on one hand, then there's Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Iran. All are big countries and we are not even looking at the East African coast. But it will be a powerful one by 2050. My idea is going to be powerful. India will have, as I mentioned, a GDP that might even go up by about 8 times. Indonesia will go up, so just imagine if others too also go up four times.

Shekhar Sinha: Sincerely hope so. That brings me to the immediate neighbourhood. Do you see the requirement of a joint HADR type of organisation so that we can come to the assistance of let's say, Bay of Bengal?

Ranil Wickremesinghe: We should work on it. I think in time to come, Maldives is going to be in trouble. Maybe even Seychelles. I think we have to do it. We have to have these agreements. Basically, one thing that worries me is the melting of the Himalayas and the impact on Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and on the Bay of Bengal.

Shekhar Sinha: What is your view on, let's say, intertwining of the economies of Indian Ocean countries or maybe the immediate neighbourhood?

Ranil Wickremesinghe: We are for it. That's why we are upgrading our agreement with India from FTA to the Comprehensive Economic and Technological Agreement. We also want to enhance our agreements with Bangladesh. We are applying to RCEP, so that from India all the way to Japan and Australia will be in one free trade zone. We have to work this out. Of course, India didn't join RCEP, but I'm sure RCEP would be more than happy to have some agreement with India and Bangladesh. So, let's say, at least from India, from Mumbai all the way to Tokyo and down to Melbourne, let's have an agreement.

Shekhar Sinha: That I think is a very workable proposition.

Ranil Wickremesinghe: That's what we have to do, yes.

Shekhar Sinha: Just one more question related to this. Do you see any specific 2-3 points

which the island nations would like India to lend their hand in?

Ranil Wickremesinghe: Others are small island nations. But with us, we are looking at closer integration with India. That's why we are looking at connectivity, financial connectivity, energy connectivity, land connectivity. So that this is the age in which countries work closely. Bangladesh already has with India, so Sri Lanka too will work on this.

Shekhar Sinha: Last questions, if you permit. I know you have to leave shortly for the airport. We, you know, with Sri Lanka have been very good at handling the big power competition or rivalry so to say and you have been at the apex for so many years in various capacities. Do you think that it is now possible for Sri Lanka to have a role in reducing the friction between these 2-3 countries?

Ranil Wickremesinghe: I think those countries have to do it themselves. India and China had a very good relationship. I think there are few outstanding issues. What we can do is to ask them to sort it out. But I think getting into the middle of it, that is not our field. but I think there has been a lot of, I must say in the last 5-10 years I've seen a lot of interaction between India and China. We could ask for a few areas, especially the Himalayas that have to be sorted out. We would like to help in any way, if it would make a difference. All of a sudden Asia comes up with two big powers coming in here, but let's see how we can work it out. It

will take a bit of time but we all hope it can be done. And actually, India Foundation is more than good to start talking on these issues.

Shekhar Sinha: How do you see the Indian Ocean's role in the larger Indo-Pacific construct?

Ranil Wickremesinghe: The Indian Ocean has been quite different from the Pacific, but we are connected. We have to accept that. It's a different one, and for thousands of years, it's sort of evolved. I mean, basically if you look at it in that context, I think we should build on what is there. Now look at India. You had linkages all the way down to South Africa; Indians have gone down there. They are out there in Australia. We have people. It's easy for us to sit down, I think and talk it over. It's different in the Pacific Islands as they're getting together. They haven't had those cultural relations. And if you look at it basically, the Ramayana has taken you all the way to Vietnam. Theravada Buddhism has also taken us all the way to Vietnam. So, these are type of links we have. And remember, it is from India that Buddhism went to China; the Taoist Temple is one such example, even in Tibet. So, these links are there within Asia and it is very big. It was the Arab traders and the Indians who've been trading with each other. Such a unique relationship exists maybe in the Mediterranean, but certainly not between the Atlantic powers or between the Pacific. So, we have something to build on. And we've also been part of the British Empire or the Dutch Empire or the French Empire, so we can work on it.

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The Notion of Welfare by State in Early India

Pallavi Prasad*

Introduction

The concept of welfare state is considered a modern formulation, wherein, to reduce the ill-effects of an industrial society, the state provides basic provisions for its citizens, through interventions in healthcare, education, employment, housing, old age pension etc. Otto von Bismarck, who served as the first chancellor of the German Empire, is usually credited with the establishment of the first modern welfare state of an industrial society in the 1880s by rolling out several social welfare programs for ordinary Germans. However, the roots of such a concept go back to ancient India, wherein the notion that the protection of life and livelihood of its subjects is the prime responsibility of the state, was deeply ingrained in the socio-political thought of that time.

In the sixth century BCE, Gautam Buddha had recommended that the king should adopt measures for the upliftment of the living conditions of the people. Political treatises like Arthashastra instruct a king to place the welfare of his subjects among his foremost duties and expend state treasury on public works. The Mauryan ruler Ashoka undertook several welfare activities including provision of medical facilities for the wellbeing of his subjects and also propounded a policy of Dhamma through his edicts, for promoting an atmosphere of concord and harmony in the society. Apart from Ashokan inscriptions, some other epigraphical records provide evidence of the welfare programmes undertaken by the Mauryan state. These are only a few examples that highlight some of the best practices that existed in early India.

The Notion of Welfare and State in Ancient India

Well-being or welfare of all is a recurrent theme in ancient Indian doctrines. Religious texts as well as various secular treatises of the ancient times are replete with concern for the happiness of every individual and society at large. The Dharmashastras emphasise that the well-being of an individual and the entire society can be achieved by the pursuit of the fourfold Purusharthas i.e. the great aims of human endeavour, at an individual level. These are – Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha which can be roughly translated as moral behaviour, wealth, worldly pleasures and salvation. An individual can have a meaningful sustained life and even achieve salvation after life, by earnestly pursuing these goals. Gautam Buddha, the founder of Buddhist philosophy, advocated the Atthanga-magga or the Noble Eight-fold path as a way of removing the root cause of suffering and overcoming desire. This path is actually the Middle Path of moderation between extreme indulgence and extreme asceticism which can lead to attainment of *'nibbana'* or salvation i.e. deliverance from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. It consists of right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness

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and right concentration. Apart from these spiritual interpretations of welfare, the close connection between the overall happiness and material conditions of people is recognised and development of material well-being too is emphasised in these philosophical discourses.

The period around the sixth century BCE witnessed the emergence of several territorial states in north India. This process was accompanied by the rise of urban centres and expansion of agriculture and trade, leading to increase in socio-economic stratification. Buddhist and Jain texts enumerate 16 powerful mahajanapadas or states that flourished in India in the sixth century BCE, and try to offer an explanation for the process of state formation. According to Mahabharata (Velakar, 1948), state is a creation of gods and initially Virajas, but later Prithu was chosen as the King by sages, to purge an anarchical situation encapsulated in the term, matsyanyaya (law of the fish). Buddhist canonical texts provide an anthropological interpretation for the creation of states in Digha Nikaya (the book of long sayings) which envisages a type of a social contract, close to the one propounded by modern European political thinkers. In the Agganna Sutta ('pertaining to beginnings') it is stated that in face of an anarchical situation, men deliberated and elected a Mahasammatta, the Great Elect, to enforce justice for which they offered him a share of their harvest. With passage of time he became the Dharmaraj (the righteous king) and brought happiness to men by establishing Dharma i.e. rule of law. In the Cakkavatti-sihanada Sutta, the cakkavatti or universal monarch is hailed as the guardian of ethical authority. It is divulged that in order to solve social problems and dispel economic inequalities caused by inequitable distribution of wealth, the state has the right to enforce legislative power (Walshe, 1995).

At a general level, Buddha was aware of the importance of material well-being of an individual and the society at large. He recognised that if the poor are not able to produce wealth, it leads to poverty, which is at the root of immorality, theft, falsehood, violence, hatred, cruelty, etc. In Digha Nikaya he recommended some measures for eradication of poverty, such as provision of grain and other facilities to farmers, providing capital to traders and adequate wages to labour. These welfare activities provide a justification for the state and the taxation system. Like a pragmatist, he recognised that the way to control crimes in the society was to uplift the living condition of people by purging them from poverty and the king or state had a role to play in this scheme.

Kautilya's Arthashastras and its Ideal King

Arthashastra, the Sanskrit classic text on statecraft, is traditionally considered a work of the fourth century BCE, written by Kautilya, also known as Vishnugupta or Chanakya, the chief minister of the first emperor of the Mauryan dynasty, Chandragupta Maurya. This political treatise is normative in nature, containing detailed prescriptions and proscriptions for the administration of a state by its ruler. It consists of 15 adhikaranas or books dealing with various aspects of internal administration (tantra), relations with the neighbouring states (avapa) and other miscellaneous subjects. It categorically states that

artha (material well-being secured through livelihood) is superior to dharma (spiritual well-being) and kama (worldly pleasures) as the latter two are dependent on it (Singh, 2008: 322). It contains the description of the circumstances of the origin of monarchy in Book I. It states that when people were oppressed by the matsyanyaya (law of the fish according to which the bigger fish swallow the smaller fish) they chose Manu as their King and fixed one-sixth portion of the grain and one tenth of their goods and money as his share. It further proclaims 'Kings who receive this share are able to ensure the well-being of their subjects' [Arthashastra 1.13.5-7]. This theory seems to describe something like an original contract for the establishment of monarchy in which people agree to pay taxes to a monarch so that he can ensure security and well-being i.e. yoga-kshema of all.

This manual on statecraft frequently refers to the obligations of a ruler towards his subjects and lays down three-fold duties for him in the internal administration of the country viz. raksha, palana and yoga-kshema. Raksha primarily means the protection of the state from external aggression as well as protection of the person and property of his subjects. The entire Book Four, called kantakashodhan, is devoted to suppression of crime and protection of people from anti-social elements like deceitful artisans and traders, thieves, dacoits and murderers, as well as their protection from natural calamities such as fire, floods etc (Kangle, [1965] 2010:117). Palana can be interpreted as the provision of security by maintenance of law and order within the state. Book Three is concerned with law and its administration as it contains a complete code of law. Yoga-kshema implies the idea of welfare, well-being, including the idea of safeguarding the happiness and prosperity of the people. In Book One it is enjoined 'In the happiness of his subjects lies the happiness of the king; in their welfare his welfare. He shall not consider as good only that which pleases him but treats as beneficial to him whatever pleases his subjects' [Arthashastra 1.19.34].

The political treatise defines welfare as 'the increase in economic activity, the protection of livelihood, the protection of vulnerable segments of society, consumer protection, the prevention of harassment of citizens, and the welfare of prisoners and labor'. In order to ensure the economic well-being of the people through increased opportunities of livelihood, Book Two advised the ruler to undertake a host of productive activities. They include activities such as sunyaniveshana i.e. settlement of virgin land; setubandha i.e. building of dams, tanks, wells and other irrigation facilities; vraja i.e. providing pasture for cattle; vanikpatha i.e. opening trade-routes and ensuring safety on them; khani i.e. working of mines; exploiting timber and elephant forests; construction of places of punyasthana or pilgrimage, groves and roads for traffic both by land and water; setting up of market towns, industries and manufacturing units and so on [Arthashastra 2.1.1,19-20]. The king is advised to provide new settlers with seeds, cattle, tax concessions and remissions in initial years and even cash in form of loans to help them reclaim land and expand agriculture [Arthashastra 2.1.13-14]. The king may provide sites, roads, timber and other necessary things to those who construct reservoirs on their own record. On one hand these

undertakings provide livelihood to people and furthered the welfare of the subjects, on the other hand they expanded the economy and augmented the resources of the state. It is recognised that a flourishing economy is beneficial for both the state and its people.

Arthashastra advises kings to take into account the welfare of all beings in formulating state policies. The interests of the subjects should be allowed to prevail over the interest of the state. It directs that the sale of commodities, imported or indigenous, should be arranged in such a manner that it is beneficial for the subjects while any profit that may be harmful to the subjects should be avoided [Arthashastra 2.16.4-6 & 4.2.27,35]. A paternalistic ideal is set before the ruler. In accordance with this attitude, it is argued that the kingdom will prosper only if the King regards his subjects with the same concern as a father regards his children. It is stated that when the subjects are struck down by natural calamities, the ruler should take care of them like a father [Arthashastra 4.3.43]. The third chapter of Book Four provides details of measures to be taken for the relief of the subjects in case of natural calamities like floods, fire, epidemic, famines etc (Kangle, [1965] 2010: 234). It recognises that like the head of a family has a responsibility of the extended family, the king or government has a crucial role to play in providing security and maintaining the material well-being of the entire country and its people. It is laid down that the king should provide maintenance for the orphans, minors, the aged, the infirm, the afflicted and those in distress, who have no one to look after them. He is further asked to provide subsistence to the helpless women when they are carrying and also to the children they give birth to as well as childless women [Arthashastra 2.1.18-26]. It asserts that the King shall protect agriculturists from the molestation of oppressive fine, forced labor and unjust exactions from corrupt officials; herds of cattle from thieves, animals and cattle disease; clear the roads from molestations of courtiers, robbers etc and even protect them from being destroyed by herds of cattle. Punishment is laid down for officers who are responsible for extortion from the subjects [Arthashastra 2.9.15-16]. The text lays down the minimum wages for laborers and herdsmen as one pana (silver coin) and a quarter per month over and above the food for them and their families [Arthashastra 2.24.28]. It elaborates rules concerning the proper treatment to be given to dasas (slaves), and debt bonded labour, both male and female, and provides appropriate penalties for their violation. These rules insist on a humane treatment for various kinds of slaves and emphasise their right to freedom on the payment of a ransom-amount. The text provides for stringent checks against fraudulent practices in trade like adulterating goods or manipulating prices or giving short weight and measures etc. Severe punishments are laid down for prison officers exceeding their authority by harassing, assaulting or maiming prisoners or criminally approaching a female prisoner or even preventing them from taking their meals or answering nature's calls [Arthashastra 4.9.21-27].

The rules about the construction of prison-house include construction of separate wards for

males and females, with halls, sanitary arrangements, provision for protection against fire and even provision for worship [Arthshastra 2.5.5-6]. It is stated that out of the various kinds of tortures recommended for securing a confession of a crime, only one torture is to be applied on any one day and there is to be no torture on two successive days. Torture is prohibited in the case of a pregnant women or a woman in the first month after delivery. The King is advised to use his power of danda i.e. coercive power of the state, to ensure the protection of the subjects and to enable the weak to hold their own against the strong. He is nevertheless advised to use danda with great care as a just use of this power secures the protection of people along with the happiness of the ruler, while its unjust use could have serious implications leading to discontentment or disaffection of his people, the most serious being a revolt of the subjects against the ruler [Arthashastra 1.4.12].

The text lays a lot of emphasis on starting productive enterprises and pursuing successful economic policies that create means of livelihood under state control. These recommendations are not just altruistic measures, but have a clear aim to augment the revenues of the state and appropriating surplus for the state treasury. At the same time the treatise warns, a King who impoverishes his own people or angers them by unjust exactions will lose their loyalty [Arthashastra 7.5.27]. Thus, a fine balance needs to be maintained between the welfare of the people and enhancing the resources of the state. The maintenance of law and order through an efficient administrative as well as just judicial machinery is one of the primary responsibilities of a state. The entire Book Four is devoted to the suppression of criminal activities with provision of punishment to thirty kinds of criminals as well as other anti-social elements like deceitful merchants, corrupt officials etc, who are identified as thorns of the society. It is recognised, 'A king meting out unjust punishment is hated by the people he terrorises while one who is too lenient is held in contempt; whoever imposes just and deserved punishment is respected and honoured [Arthashastra 1.4.7-10]. While exploring issues of social welfare, the text advises the king to create buffer stocks of grains and other products in state stores to prevent a wide fluctuation in prices and also to create reserve stock which could be distributed during natural calamities, giving tax exemptions to the affected population and initiating public projects such as building forts around major strategic holdings, construction of irrigation waterways for its people. It also lays down regulations for the protection of wild life, providing a long list of punishments for cruelty to animals, provisions for veterinary doctors, creation of animal sanctuaries etc.

The ideal ruler, according to Arthashastra is one who takes care of his subjects like a father, invests in the economy to augment the resources of the state as well as its people, maintains law and order through an effective administrative machinery and a just judicial system, guards against fraudulent practices and provides support to ' those who have necessarily to be maintained' by the state [Arthashastra 1.12.1]. It enumerates the seven essential elements of the state as svamin, the King; amatya, the minister; janapada, the territory settled

with people; durga, the fortified capital; kosa, the treasury; danda, the army or justice and mitra, the ally. However, it needs to be kept in mind that this manual on statecraft is normative in nature. The detailed prescriptions and injunctions are mere recommendations for a king which could be put into practice by a well-intentioned ruler. In a monarchical setup a great deal often depended on the personality and will of the particular ruler. Instead of reflecting the reality of the times the text mirrors the ideal of its times which aims at welfare of all.

Ashoka and his Dhamma

The well-being of his people through the propagation of dhamma was the primary concern of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka. Ashoka's inscriptions are divided into two main categories, the 14 major rock edicts, including Separate Rock Edict 1 and 2 of Dhauli and Jaugada, and the seven pillar edicts that are discovered in different places all over India with minor variations. These inscriptions provide an insight into Ashoka's ideas about his role as a king and even his own assessment of his success at dissemination of Dhamma. The ideals of kingship as discerned through his edicts on Dhamma include ensuring the welfare of all beings and his subjects in this world and the next. In Separate Rock Edict 1, exhibiting a paternal attitude he expresses, 'All men are my children. Just as with regard to my own children, I desire that they may be provided with all kinds of welfare and happiness in this world and the next world, I desire the same for all men'. He sought to ensure peoples' welfare by planting beneficial medicinal herbs, roots and fruit bearing trees and digging wells along the roads, building resting places and providing medical care for people as well as animals in his empire (Major rock edict 2). Ashoka created a special cadre of dhamma mahamatras in the 13th year after his consecration, to spread the message of Dhamma within the kingdom and among border people. They were given the responsibility of promoting the welfare of prisoners and releasing those who were afflicted, aged or had children, organising charities and working for the welfare and happiness of all sects (Major rock edict 5). The ceremony of Dhamma is described as consisting of proper courtesy to slaves and servants, obedience to mother and father, generosity towards friends, relatives and acquaintances as well as Brahmanas and Shramanas, and abstaining from killing living beings (Singh, 2008: 352).

Generation of an atmosphere of concord and mutual respect among people of different religious communities is an important aspect of Ashoka's Dhamma, which aims at the welfare of all. In Major rock edict 12 he urges people to exercise restraint in praising their own sect and in criticising other sects, while trying to honour and understand each other's religion. In the 6th pillar Edict, Ashoka states that the purpose of his edicts was a concern for the welfare and happiness of his subjects, who, if they ordered their lives according to the principles of Dhamma, would attain happiness in this world and in the next world too. Major Rock Edict 6 and Separate Rock Edict 2, refer to the debt that he owes to all living beings, which he wanted to discharge by fulfilling his most important duty of

promoting the welfare of the whole world, remaining in touch with people's affairs at all times and promptly dispatching public business. He instructs 'At all times, whether I am eating, or am in the women's apartments, or in my inner apartments, or at the cattle-shed, or in my carriage, or in my gardens- wherever I may be, my informants should keep me in touch with public business' (Major rock edict 6). It is through the practice of such a Dhamma, Ashoka desired to enhance the well-being of all men as well as animals inhabiting his empire.

Other Inscriptional Testimonies

The epigraphical testimonies of Sohgaura, Mahasthan and Junagarh\Girnar inscriptions provide evidence of some of the welfare activities undertaken by the Mauryan state. The Sohagaura inscription of Gorakhpur is a short inscription of four lines that recorded an order by the mahamatras of Shravasti to distribute and not withhold, the contents of the storehouses of five places—Triveni, Mathura, Chanchu, Modama, and Bhadra, in case of outbreak of drought. The Mahasthan inscription from Bagura district of Bangladesh records an order to the mahamatra of Pundranagar, to take adequate measures to relieve distress caused to people on account of famine. The measures undertaken included the advancing of a loan in coins and distribution of paddy from the granary to help them tide over the calamity (Hazra, 2002:43-60). The Girnar inscription of Junagarh records that the construction of a water reservoir known as the Sudarshana Lake was begun during the time of Chandragupta Maurya

and completed during the reign of Ashoka. These famine relief measures and construction of irrigation facilities would have surely provided respite to the distressed population of the concerned area. These inscriptions, along with the internal evidence of Ashokan edicts sufficiently demonstrate that the early Indian state, especially during the Mauryan period, recognised its responsibility and played an active role in advancing the welfare of its subjects. The Mauryan state expended state treasury on the construction and maintenance of roads, wells, and rest-houses, of building irrigation facilities such as the dam on the Sudarshana Lake in Girnar, providing medical treatment for men as well as animals, and planting of mango-groves, banyan trees, medicinal herbs, roots and other useful trees.

Conclusion

The idea of advancement of welfare of people through active state intervention is clearly envisaged in the socio-political doctrines of ancient India. Welfare measures like enhancing economic activities, providing employment opportunities, investing in public works, relief measures during calamities, medical facilities, accountability and accessibility of the king, safeguards against fraudulent practices etc are some of the ideas that comprise the notion of welfare in the texts and inscriptions of early India. While the onus of enhancing mental and spiritual well-being of an individual lies on the concerned person, the responsibility of ensuring material welfare and social justice is largely recognised as the responsibility of the state or the government of the day.

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