

08

**COMMITTEE
ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
(2024-25)**

EIGHTEENTH LOK SABHA

**MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
EVALUATION INDIA'S INDIAN OCEAN STRATEGY
EIGHTH REPORT**



**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI**

August, 2025/Shravana, 1947



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COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
(2024-25)

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MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

EVALUATION INDIA'S INDIAN OCEAN STRATEGY

Presented to Lok Sabha on 11 August, 2025

Laid on the Table of Rajya Sabha on 11 August, 2025



LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (2024-25)	(i)
INTRODUCTION	(ii)
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	(iii)

PART – I

REPORT

CHAPTER 1: INDIAN OCEAN REGION: A GEOPOLITICAL OVERVIEW	1-22
Significance of the Indian Ocean Region	
Challenges and Prospects	
Engagement with Littoral States	
India's Approach towards Indian Ocean Region	
CHAPTER 2: MARITIME SECURITY AND STRATEGY IN INDIAN OCEAN REGION	23-52
Challenges and Threat Perception	
Maritime Policy and Strategy in IOR	
Role Of Indian Navy in IOR	
Maritime Infrastructure	
CHAPTER 3: ROLE OF MULTILATERAL INSTITUTIONS AND REGIONAL GROUPINGS	53-88
Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)	
Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI)	
Bay Of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)	
Quad	
Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)	
CHAPTER 4: CULTURAL AND DIASPORA LINKS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION	89-93

PART-II

94-120

RECOMMENDATIONS/OBSERVATIONS

Appendix I	Minutes of the Eighth Sitting of the Committee held on 18 December 2024	121-123
Appendix II	Minutes of the Twenty Second Sitting of the Committee held on 17 June 2025	124-126
Appendix III	Minutes of The Twenty Seventh Sitting of the Committee held on 06 August 2025	127-128

COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (2024-25)

Dr. Shashi Tharoor, Chairperson

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3. Shri Vijay Baghel
4. Shri Mitesh Patel Bakabhai
5. Shri Abhishek Banerjee
6. Shri Arun Govil
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Rajya Sabha

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Secretariat

- | | | | |
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| 1. | Shri Anjani Kumar | — | Joint Secretary |
| 2. | Smt. Reena Gopalakrishnan | — | Director |
| 3. | Ms. Smita Singh | — | Assistant Committee Officer |

INTRODUCTION

I, the Chairperson, Committee on External Affairs (2024-25) having been authorized by the Committee to submit the Report on their behalf, present this Eighth Report (18th Lok Sabha) on the subject 'Evaluation of India's Indian Ocean Strategy'.

2. The Committee selected the subject 'Evaluation of India's Indian Ocean Strategy' for detailed examination during 2024-25. Briefing on the subject was held on 18 December 2024. Thereafter, the Committee took oral evidence of the representatives of the Ministries of External Affairs and Defence on 17 June 2025.

3. The Report was considered and adopted by the Committee at their Sitting held on 06 August 2025. The Minutes of the Sitzings of the Committee are appended to the Report.

4. The Committee wish to express their gratitude to the Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Defence for placing material information as well as tendering evidence and views before the Committee.

5. The Committee would also like to place on record their deep sense of appreciation for the invaluable support rendered to them by the officials of Lok Sabha Secretariat attached to the Committee.

6. For facility of reference, the Observations/Recommendations of the Committee have been printed in bold letters in the Report.

NEW DELHI
11 August, 2025
20 Shravana, 1947 (Saka)

Dr. Shashi Tharoor,
Chairperson,
Committee on External Affairs

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACMECS	Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle and Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya- Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
BEC	BIMSTEC Energy Centre
BIMSTEC	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
BCWC	BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CDRI	Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure
CGIMA	Contact Group Against Illicit Maritime Activities
CGPCS	Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia
CGSUAS	Coast Guard Ship-borne Unmanned Aerial System
CIOs	Chair of Indian Ocean Studies
CORPAT	Coordinated Patrols
DCOC-JA	Djibouti Code of Conduct-Jeddah Amendment
DRI	Directorate of Revenue Intelligence
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
HADR	Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief
GMLU	Gujarat Maritime Law University
ICG	Indian Coastal Guard
IPMDA	Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness
IOC	Indian Ocean Commission
IOD	Indian Ocean Dialogue
IONS	Indian Ocean Naval Symposium
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
IORA	Indian Ocean Rim Association
IOIP	IORA's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific
IFC-IOR	Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region
IMBL	International Maritime Boundary Lines
IPOI	Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative
ITEC	Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation
IUU	Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated
KIP	Know India Programme
MAHASAGAR	Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions
MAITRI	Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific
MBDs	Mission Based Deployments
MDA	Maritime Domain Awareness
MGC	Mekong - Ganga Cooperation
MLEAs	Multi-Lateral Engagement at Sea
MRCCs	Maritime Rescue Coordination Centres

NC31	National Command, Control, Communications and Intelligence Network
NCB	Narcotics Control Bureau
NISHAR	Network for Information Sharing
PBD	Pravasi Bharatiya Divas
PCTD	Promotion of Cultural Ties with Diaspora
PICs	Pacific Island Countries
QMSWG	QUAD Maritime Security Working Group
ReCAAP	Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery
RIS	Research and Information System for Developing Countries
RRU	Rashtriya Raksha University
SAGAR	Security and Growth for All in the Region
SPDC	Scholarship Programme for Diaspora Children
VATMs	Vessel and Air Traffic Management Systems
UDA	Underwater Domain Awareness
WRS	World Registry of Shipping

CHAPTER 1

INDIAN OCEAN REGION: GEOPOLITICAL OVERVIEW

The Indian Ocean is the third-largest oceanic division in the world, encompassing critical sea lanes, strategic chokepoints, and a diverse group of littoral and hinterland states. The Indian Ocean is spread over an area of over 70 million square km, connecting over 35 littoral states and is home to one-third of world's population. Hosting over two-thirds of the world's oil shipments, one-third of global bulk cargo traffic, and key undersea data cables, the Indian Ocean is crucial not only for regional actors but also for maintaining the stability of the global order.

1.2 The Indian Ocean is vital to India's geopolitical, economic, and cultural landscape, with a coastline exceeding 11,098.91 kilometers and over 1,300 islands. Historically, it has been a key corridor for trade, migration, and cultural exchange. Economically, the region holds immense significance, with India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) spanning 2.4 million square kilometers. Around 90% of India's trade by volume, including nearly all oil imports, transits through the Indian Ocean. Globally, these waters handle half of container shipments, a third of bulk cargo, and two-thirds of oil shipments.

I. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION

1.3 Highlighting the significance of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), the Ministry stated the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has nearly 40% of the world's population which is spread over around 35 littoral states. India has an extensive coastline of 11,098 km and over 1300 islands between Lakshadweep in the west and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands in the east. Hence, Indian Ocean is vital for India. India is not only geographically connected to the Indian Ocean Region but shares civilizational and cultural links with the countries in Indian Ocean. Throughout history, the Indian Ocean Region has been characterized by commercial flows, alongside migration of people, ideas and cultures.

1.4 Economically, India has a vast Exclusive Economic Zone of 2.4 million square kilometers and 90% of India's trade by volume and almost all of India's oil imports come through the sea. Almost a hundred thousand ships a year pass through waters of Indian Ocean, carrying about half of the world's container shipments, one-third of the world's bulk cargo traffic and two-thirds of the oil shipments. Three quarters of this traffic is headed for destinations beyond the region. It is the medium that connects the producers of the Gulf and Western Indian Ocean to the consumers of South and East Asia and vice-versa.

1.5 In addition, the region's vast Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) offer immense potential for cooperation in areas like sustainable fisheries, marine biodiversity, renewable ocean energy, and eco-tourism. India's experience and growing focus on the Blue Economy create potential for collaboration in these areas.

1.6 Enclosed on three sides by land and with limited exchange with polar waters, the Indian Ocean is the warmest of the world's oceans. This unique geography and thermal profile make it an ecologically dynamic and biologically productive space. High concentrations of phytoplankton support a diverse range of marine life, including economically significant fish stocks and some of the oldest coral reef ecosystems in the world. These reefs not only sustain marine biodiversity but also protect coastal communities from erosion and storm surges.

1.7 Circulation patterns in the Indian Ocean are primarily governed by the seasonal monsoon systems, which influence regional climate and ocean productivity. The ocean's islands - such as the Maldives, Seychelles, and India's own Andaman & Nicobar Islands - are globally recognized biodiversity hotspots, harboring numerous endemic species and delicate ecosystems. However, these environmental assets are increasingly threatened by climate change, sea-level rise, unsustainable fishing practices, marine pollution, and coastal development pressures. The environmental significance of the Indian Ocean extends beyond ecological value; it is also vital to regional food security, disaster resilience, and economic sustainability.

II CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

1.8 The Ministry of External Affairs has broadly identified three challenges in the Indian Ocean Region:

- **Geopolitical challenge:** The most prominent challenge India faces in the IOR is the increasing presence of extra regional players with investments in ports and infrastructure (e.g., in Sri Lanka and Maldives) thereby expanding their strategic footprint and adversely impacting our security interests.
- **Maritime Security Threats:** The region faces issues like piracy, terrorism, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUU fishing), drug trafficking and smuggling.
- **Infrastructure and Connectivity Gaps:** Several IOR countries, including key partners like Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius and Seychelles, face infrastructural and financial limitations. India has been providing need-based and demand driven developmental assistance to countries in IOR towards development of infrastructure ranging from housing, civil works, schools, hospitals, regional connectivity infrastructure in the region.

1.9 The Committee enquired about the strategic challenges faced by India in the IOR. In a written reply the Ministry stated that strategic challenges for India in the IOR include threats to maritime traffic, piracy, terrorism, concerns about freedom of navigation and overflights, and concerns of safeguarding of sovereignty and of independence. Another challenge is the growing presence of extra-regional players in the region, especially China gaining a foothold in the Indian Ocean Region. China has been undertaking several infrastructure projects focusing on ports, airport and logistics sector for dual use purpose, in addition to deploying research and survey vessels in the region to augment maritime domain awareness and collect sensitive oceanography and marine data of the region.

1.10 Regarding the steps taken to counter the challenges, the Ministry informed that India has been actively sensitizing friendly countries through bilateral and regional forums in the Indian Ocean Region to counter these activities. The Colombo Security Conclave, Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and QUAD cooperation are few framework mechanisms, under which

India is working closely with countries in the region and with like-minded countries. India continues to calibrate its approach and deepen defense and maritime security cooperation complemented by economic and developmental assistance to safeguard its interests in the region.

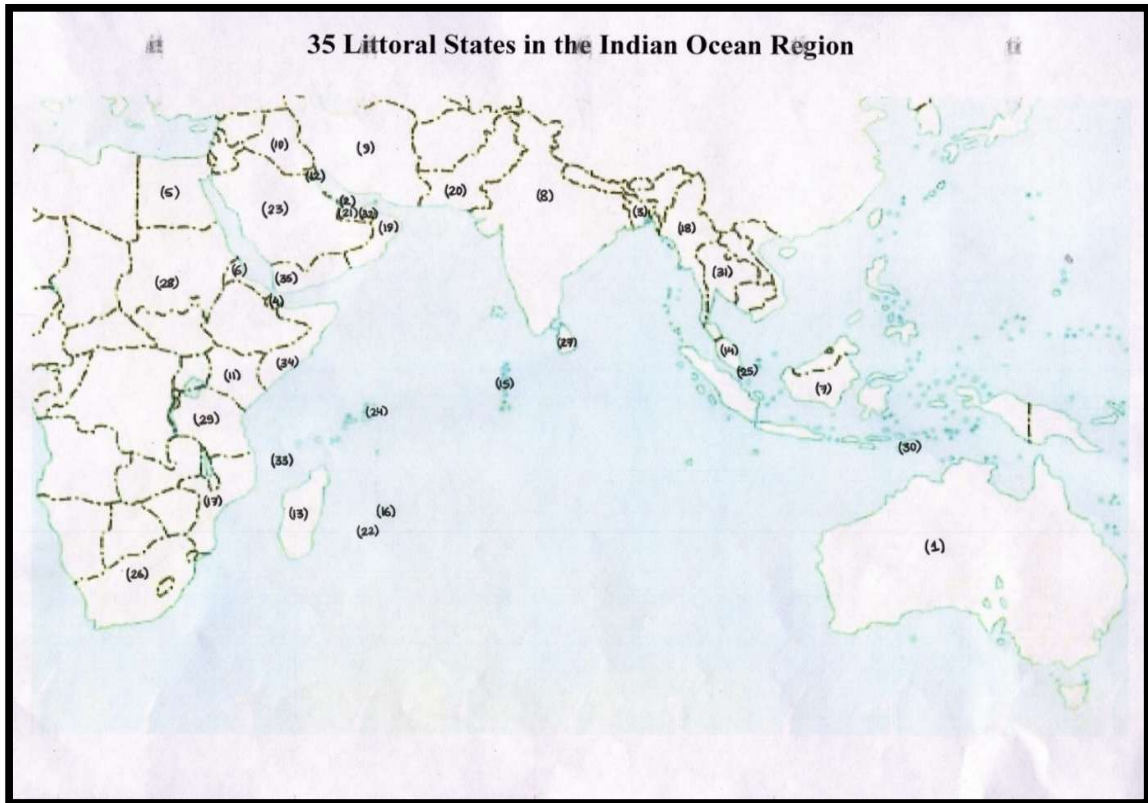
1.11 As per the Ministry the prospects of India in the Indian Ocean Region can be summarized as under:

- **Strategic Partnerships:** India's approach to the Indian Ocean Region has been guided by 'Neighbourhood First' policy and Vision SAGAR, which has now evolved into Vision MAHASAGAR, *i.e.*, Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions for the Global South. These frameworks guide our cooperation in a range of areas including development cooperation, capacity building, defence and maritime security and HADR assistance. During PM's visit to Sri Lanka from 04-06 April, 2025, a MoU on Defence Framework Cooperation was signed. During the recent PM's visit to Mauritius, the partnership was elevated to enhanced strategic partnership. Further, in line with Vision MAHASAGAR, India extends assistance in form of deployment of assets and deputation of experts with the aim to enhance defence and security capabilities of countries in IOR.
- **Blue Economy:** The region's vast Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) offer immense potential for cooperation in areas like sustainable fisheries, marine biodiversity, renewable ocean energy, and eco-tourism. India's experience and growing focus on the Blue Economy create potential for collaboration in these areas.
- **Regional Leadership:** India plays a key role in multilateral platforms such as the Colombo Security Conclave, Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). These forums can enable India to further promote a rules-based order, facilitate regional cooperation, and act as a net security provider.

III. ENGAGEMENT WITH LITTORAL STATES

1.12 The region encompasses 35 littoral states, which face shared challenges such as developmental disparities, connectivity issues, unsustainable debt, extremism, terrorism, natural disasters, and climate change. The 35 littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region include Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Réunion (France), Indonesia, India, Iraq,

Iran, Kuwait, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Myanmar, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Timor- Leste, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.



- | | | |
|----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Australia | 15. Maldives | 29. Tanzania |
| 2. Bahrain | 16. Mauritius | 30. Timor-Leste |
| 3. Bangladesh | 17. Mozambique | 31. Thailand |
| 4. Djibouti | 18. Myanmar | 32. UAE |
| 5. Egypt | 19. Oman | 33. Comoros |
| 6. Eritrea | 20. Pakistan | 34. Somalia |
| 7. Indonesia | 21. Qatar | 35. Yemen |
| 8. India | 22. Réunion | |
| 9. Iran | 23. Saudi Arabia | |
| 10. Iraq | 24. Seychelles | |
| 11. Kenya | 25. Singapore | |
| 12. Kuwait | 26. South Africa | |
| 13. Madagascar | 27. Sri Lanka | |
| 14. Malaysia | 28. Sudan | |

1.13 The Ministry informed that India maintains diplomatic presence in 32 littoral States. Following are the three countries where India does not have direct diplomatic presence:

Sl No	Littoral States where India does not have direct diplomatic presence	
1.	Comoros	Embassy of India in Antananarivo, Madagascar is concurrently accredited to Comoros.
2.	Somalia (Mogadishu)	High Commission of India, Nairobi was concurrently accredited to Somalia in 1991. Indian Embassy in Mogadishu was closed after the outbreak of a Somali Civil War in 1991.
3.	Yemen (Sana)	Embassy of India in Sana'a is operated from Riyadh. The Indian Embassy in Sanaa, Yemen, was closed in April 2015 due to the outbreak of the Yemeni Civil War.

1.14 The details of diplomatic presence of India in the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region is given in Annexure-I.

1.15 India has fostered strong bilateral and multilateral partnerships with all key partners and like-minded countries in the IOR and continue its commitment to the well-being and progress of nations in the region as a first responder and a net security provider, based on our Neighbourhood First policy, MAHASAGAR outlook, and on our approach to the extended neighbourhood.

1.16 Developmental assistance, capacity building programmes, HADR support and defence and maritime security cooperation are the core pillars of India's relationship with countries in the IOR, assisting them in their socio-economic development. India has been the 'First Responder' in the region offering timely and effective HADR support and has extended its capacities to respond to natural disasters and man-made accidents. India has also established itself as the net security provider in the IOR. The Indian Navy has been part of anti-piracy patrols in the sea routes of the Indian Ocean. India has undertaken projects to help enhance the coastal and EEZ surveillance capacity of the Indian Ocean Island states.

1.17 When asked about the bilateral strategic partnerships fostered by India, including defense and security ties with Indian Ocean littoral States, the Ministry responded that India has fostered strong bilateral partnerships, including defense and security ties, with Indian Ocean littoral states in South Asia, Gulf, Eastern Africa and smaller island states such as Comoros, Mauritius, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Seychelles. A brief overview of these relations includes:

(a) Given our close cultural and historical ties with the neighbouring and other countries in the Indian Ocean Region, India has been working closely with countries in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) namely, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar and Comoros on range of areas from development partnership, defence and maritime security, capacity building and HADR assistance, as per respective countries' need and requirements. Notable among them include Indian Housing Project and Island-wide ambulance services in Sri Lanka, Metro Express Project, Social Housing Units and New ENT Hospital Projects in Mauritius, National College of Policing and Law Enforcement and Addu city development projects in Maldives among others. In the area of defence, India has been supporting these countries with provisioning of Dornier aircraft in Sri Lanka, Maldives and Mauritius; helicopters in Maldives and Mauritius; and Coastal Radar Surveillance System in Maldives and Seychelles, deputing technical experts to Mauritius for assisting their Mauritius Police Force and similarly to Maldives for operating the aviation platforms for medical evacuation and surveillance purpose, deploying ships for joint maritime and EEZ surveillance, undertaking joint exercises to counter maritime challenges and conducting customized training programme in the defence and maritime domain. Further, India is also cooperating with Mauritius, Seychelles and Sri Lanka on hydrography and assisting Mauritius with setting up of a National Maritime Information Sharing Centre (NMISC) & exploring similar NMISC with Comoros. India is also hosting Liaison Officers from Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Maldives and Seychelles at the IFC-IOR in India. These measures are aimed at

consolidating India's role as "Net Security Provider" in the region and to augment capabilities of countries in the Indian Ocean Region on maritime domain awareness and to counter maritime challenges.

(b) Africa: India and Africa are maritime neighbours connecting through the Indian Ocean which provides trade route to establish commercial linkages and strong people to people connections. India has maintained a vibrant relationship with African countries based on the 10 guiding principles enunciated by the Prime Minister in his speech to the Parliament of Uganda in 2018. The four pillars of India's Foreign Policy in Africa resonate with our Indian Ocean Strategy: Developmental Partnership Assistance (DPA) and capacity building; defence and maritime security; trade and investment and robust people to people ties. Our long-standing development partnership with Africa is structured around India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS). Under DPA, Government of India has committed during IAFS-III to provide US \$ 10 billion concessional loans (Line of Credit). India has also provided assistance to Africa through various grants projects of over USD 700 million since 2015, which has exceeded to our announced commitment of US \$ 600 million under IAFS-III.

c) Bangladesh: Bangladesh and India have expressed their commitment to a free, open, inclusive, secure, and rules-based Indo-Pacific region and to achieve this Bangladesh has agreed to be a co-lead with India on the Pillar 05 - Disaster Risk Reduction and Management pillar of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI). Under this initiative, both sides agreed to co-operate towards mitigating disaster risks, building disaster resilient infrastructure, and contributing to the sustenance of our shared maritime region. Bangladesh and India are both members of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), a regional organization that promotes economic cooperation between countries bordering the Bay of Bengal. Bangladesh leads the Trade, Investment and Development sector and the Blue economy sub-sector under BIMSTEC. Bangladesh is also a

part of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and chaired the organization for the period 2021-2023.

(d) Myanmar: India and Myanmar share a land border of 1643 kms, as well as a maritime boundary of around 1100 kms in the Bay of Bengal. Both countries share a heritage of spiritual, historical, linguistic and ethnic ties. Myanmar is India's gateway to Southeast Asia as it is the only ASEAN country adjoining India and sits at the confluence of our two key foreign policy initiatives – 'Act East' and 'Neighbourhood First'. Maritime cooperation between the two countries is robust and has witnessed gradual upswing over past few years. India has supported capacity building efforts of the Myanmar Navy and their personnel regularly subscribe to training courses offered by the Indian Navy. Both navies regularly undertake coordinated patrols along the International Maritime Boundary Line, passage exercises and ships-visits to friendly ports.

(e) India and Australia are Indian Ocean partners with a shared vision for a peaceful, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific. The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) between India and Australia, signed in 2020, has witnessed transformational growth. There is a greater convergence between the two countries in the understanding of, and approach to, the geo-strategic environment, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. In its National Defense Strategy (NDS), Australia calls India as its "top-tier security partner". Australia co-hosted Indian Ocean Conference with India in its 'Indian Ocean Capital' Perth in February 2024. Both India and Australia are members of the IORA, IONS, IPMDA, ASEAN Regional Forum, Asia Pacific Partnership on Climate and Clean Development, and have participated in the East Asia Summits. Australia is leading the Maritime Ecology Pillar of IPOI. There is enhanced maritime domain awareness cooperation with Australia in the Indian Ocean region in the field of defence and security through information sharing, increased number and complexity in exercises and operations between the navies/other elements of military and

constabulary forces, trusted interoperability and elements of interchangeability are some of the key achievements. The key enablers have been several MoUs/IAs on deployment of Maritime Patrol Aircraft, Information exchange protocols and Mutual Logistics Support Arrangements enabling first ever submarine deployments, MPAs on mainland and island territories, logistics support at sea, air and land by each other's troops/ forces. Australia hosted Exercise Malabar off its east coast for the first time in 2023.

IV. INDIA'S APPROACH TOWARDS INDIAN OCEAN REGION

1.18 India's policy in the Indian Ocean region (IOR) is centered on maintaining security, fostering regional cooperation, and promoting strategic and economic interests with the objective of promoting greater prosperity in the region and of making the Indian Ocean a free, open and inclusive space, based on the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS).

1.19 India's policy towards the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is encapsulated in the 'Neighbourhood First' approach in the maritime domain, further refined by the SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) doctrine, announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015. In March 2025, with the objective to expand our Vision to encompass broader regional cooperation across the Global South, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi outlined the MAHASAGAR doctrine *i.e.* "Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions" (an extension of SAGAR doctrine) in Mauritius.

1.20 India's approach to the Indian Ocean Region is broadly composed of the following elements:

- i. Security and Stability: India's commitment to the well-being and progress of nations of the Indian Ocean, including as first responder and a net security provider, is based on our Neighbourhood First policy, on the SAGAR outlook, and on our approach to the extended neighbourhood as well. It draws on our broader vision of an Indo-Pacific

that is built on a rules-based international order, rule of law, sustainable and transparent infrastructure investment, freedom of navigation and over-flight, and sincere respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. India is focused on ensuring the security of the sea lanes that pass through the Indian Ocean, as they are crucial for global trade and energy flows. India actively engages in counter-piracy operations and cooperates with other nations to combat IUU fishing, maritime terrorism and maritime criminal activities.

ii. Bilateral and Multilateral Strategic Partnerships and Groupings: India has fostered strong bilateral partnerships, including defense and security ties, with countries in the Indian Ocean region, such as Mauritius, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Seychelles. Multilateral groupings such as the Quad, BIMSTEC, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) facilitate regional cooperation.

a. India is a founding member of the 23-member IORA, a regional grouping aimed at strengthening economic cooperation, maritime safety, and environmental security. India views the IORA as a platform for promoting sustainable development, economic growth and prosperity, and stability in the region. As the Vice-Chair of IORA for the term 2023-25 and as Chair in 2025-27, India will work on consolidating and streamlining efforts to promote cooperation in the realms of the 6 priority areas and 2 cross-cutting themes of the IORA, with particular emphasis on maritime safety and security, and blue economy of which India is the Coordinating Country working closely with Chairs Australia and Indonesia respectively.

b. The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), announced by Prime Minister in 2019, is an open, non-treaty based global initiative that seeks to manage, conserve, sustain, and secure the maritime domain. So far, 15 countries are part of the IPOI and are co-leading one of its 7 pillars. 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.

- c. BIMSTEC 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 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.
- d. The Quad and its elevation to the Summit level has been aimed at ensuring delivery of public goods. It addresses maritime security, safety, HADR, environment protection, connectivity, strategic technologies, supply chain resilience, health, education and cyber security, amongst others.
- e. Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) is a smaller organization with five member states: Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, and France (via Réunion). It focuses on economic and environmental issues but has broadened its scope to include maritime security.

India was granted observer status in 2020, signaling an important addition in its engagement with the Western Indian Ocean.

- iii. Infrastructure and Connectivity: India has been investing in the development of ports across the Indian Ocean, such as in Sri Lanka, Mauritius, and Seychelles, to enhance connectivity and strategic presence. The development of Chabahar Port in Iran is a significant example, aimed at strengthening ties with Central Asia, Iran and Afghanistan.
- iv. Blue Economy and Development Cooperation: India is committed to promoting Blue Economy through the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and job creation, while preserving the health of the ocean. India is focusing on promoting sustainable development through blue economy projects such as fishing, mineral exploration, and marine research. India provides economic and military assistance, infrastructure development, and technical support to smaller island nations in the region, strengthening ties and ensuring their development is aligned with regional stability. To ensure the safety of navigation in the IOR has been the hydrographic support provided to chart the waters of the region along with a large component of training.
- v. Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief: India plays the role of a reliable 'first responder'. With this objective, India provided Covid aid and medicines, PPE Kits, face masks and Anti-retroviral medicines and anti- TB drugs to various countries in the IOR Region such as- Kiribati, Fiji, Maldives, Seychelles & Comoros, Nauru, Solomon Islands, Mozambique and other Disaster relief material, approx. 9,655 kgs to Tonga, in 2022. In 2023, India sent essential medicines and medical equipments to Palau and drugs worth Rs. 1.15 crores to Fiji. In 2024, 19 tons of disaster relief material and 6 tons of emergency use medical supplies were provided, during landslides, to Papua New Guinea and essential medicines used in Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (IMCI) vaccination for the pediatric population to Fiji. In May,

during the floods in Kenya, India provided 22 tons of HADR items. In the wake of floods caused by Typhoon Yagi, India launched Operation 'Sadbhav' in September and provided 53 tons of disaster relief material and medical supplies to Myanmar, 10 tons to Laos and 35 tons to Vietnam. Besides, India has also formulated the guidelines of HADR for the IORA.

- vi. People-to-people ties: Cultural and diaspora links in the countries of the Indian Ocean Region from the Indian Ocean Island nations to the East African nations and the Gulf countries and South East Asia are deep and firmly rooted in history and shared heritage. Cultural diplomacy, and the promotion of democratic values in the region enhances India's image as a benevolent regional leader.

1.21 Despite the geopolitical, economic and cultural significance of the Indian Ocean, the Committee were keen to know the reason India not give adequate attention to the Indian Ocean region in its foreign policy before the enunciation of the SAGAR doctrine. The Ministry responded that India has always recognized the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) as crucial and has given adequate attention in its foreign policy due to its strategic location, long coastline and energy trade routes. Our policy prior SAGAR was focused on the following:

- Non-Alignment and Regional Autonomy (During the cold war Period)
- Advocated for the Indian Ocean as a “Zone of Peace” (UN Resolution of 1972).
- Look East Policy (1991).
- Modernising and Expanding our Naval capabilities.
- Bilateral Maritime Cooperation with littoral states to combat piracy, disaster relief, capacity building etc.
- Maritime Security Operations and Anti-Piracy Operations to protect merchant ships.
- Multilateral Engagements like IORA, Quad, IONS etc.

1.22 Thus India's policy on IOR prior to SAGAR focused on security, securing trade routes, bilateral and multilateral cooperation. These policies later laid the foundation and were encompassed under the wider ambit of SAGAR doctrine which has been more cohesive and inclusive. The point to note here, is that as our economic strength increased, our ambitions increased and we were able to dedicate more resources to project and promote our interests in the region, and work with multiple partners and engage with regional for a more purposefully.

a. Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) and Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions (MAHASAGAR)

1.23 SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region), articulated by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi during a visit to Mauritius in March 2015, is India's vision for a secure, cooperative, and prosperous Indian Ocean region. It emphasizes collective action on maritime security, economic growth, and development. This succinctly outlines our vision for the region – of advancing cooperation and using our capabilities for larger benefit.

1.24 SAGAR focuses on:

- (i) enhancing capacities to safeguard land and maritime territories & interests;
- (ii) deepening economic and security cooperation in the littoral;
- (iii) promoting collective action to deal with natural disasters and maritime threats like piracy, terrorism and emergent non-state actors;
- (iv) working towards sustainable regional development through enhanced collaboration; and,
- (v) engaging with countries beyond our shores with the aim of building greater trust and promoting respect for maritime rules, norms and peaceful resolution of disputes.

1.25 Regarding tangible outcome derived under SAGAR since it was announced in 2015, the Ministry elaborated that India's commitment to the well-being and progress of nations of the Indian Ocean is based on our Neighbourhood First policy, on the SAGAR outlook, and on our approach to

the extended neighbourhood as well. India has established itself as the 'First Responder' in the region offering timely and effective HADR support and has extended its capacities to respond to natural disasters and man-made accidents.

1.26 Some of the activities conducted by India as a first responder for HADR include:

- Providing relief assistance during floods in Sri Lanka in 2016, Cyclone Mora – Bangladesh in 2017, earthquake in Indonesia in 2018, Cyclone in Madagascar and Mozambique in 2018-19, drought in Madagascar in 2021, Cyclone Mocha in Myanmar in 2023 (Operation Karuna), landslides in Papua New Guinea in 2024, Typhoon in Myanmar in 2024 (Operation Sadbhav), earth quake in Myanmar in 2025 (Operation Brahma),
- Sending of a 10 member Indian Coast Guard team to help Mauritius manage the oil spill of MV Wakashio in July 2020
- Emergency assistance during the fire accident on-board MT New Diamond (September 2020) and oil spill and fire accident of MV X-Press Pearl (June 2021) off coast of Sri Lanka
- Providing vaccines, aid and medicines, PPE Kits, face masks and Anti-retroviral medicines and anti-TB drugs to various countries in the IOR Region during the COVID pandemic
- India has formulated the guidelines of HADR for the IORA. India has also circulated guidelines on HADR and SOPs on Search and Rescue (SAR) under East Asia Summit (EAS) mechanism.

1.27 India has also established itself as the net security provider in the IOR. The Indian Navy has been part of anti-piracy patrols in the sea routes of the Indian Ocean. India has undertaken projects to help enhance the coastal and EEZ surveillance capacity of the Indian Ocean Island states.

1.28 Some of the activities that India carries out in Indian Ocean Region include:

- Deploying ships for maritime security and anti-piracy operations in Western Indian Ocean (Gulf of Aden, Red Sea and Gulf of Oman).
- Conducting joint EEZ surveillance exercises with several countries including Maldives, Mauritius and Seychelles.

- Carrying out coordinated patrols in areas of interest where illicit maritime activities are known to be higher.
- Participating in variety of multilateral and plurilateral initiatives to enhance the regional maritime security along with partner nations.
- Information sharing through Information Fusion Centre (IFC-IOR) at Gurugram to enable a greater regional maritime security.

These are some of the activities that have led to a positive perception of India as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region.

1.29 On being asked about the expected outcome of the evolution of the SAGAR doctrine into MAHASAGAR in terms of strengthening regional maritime security in the IOR, the Ministry stated that the evolution of SAGAR doctrine into MAHASAGAR envisage the following objectives in regional maritime security:

- MAHASAGAR initiative will further promote India's maritime leadership in IOR as Net Security Provider and First Responder.
- Enhance India's Maritime Capabilities, by expanding the scope of our engagements and the range of our partners, for training , exercises and other activities.
- Strengthen Maritime Security relations with countries in the broader Global South, in addition to just the IOR.
- Augment operational effectiveness in safeguarding IOR maritime domain through joint training exercise, sharing best practices and use of advanced technologies.
- Help in formulating maritime security framework that are responsive and resilient to contemporary challenges.

1.30 The Committee further enquired about how MAHASAGAR doctrine was distinct from the SAGAR doctrine in terms of strategic approach, goals, and execution. In a written reply, the Ministry stated that Vision SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) was launched by Prime Minister Narendra

Modi in March 2015. The objective of Vision SAGAR was to safeguard India's interests in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and ensure its safety, security, and stability as well as freedom of navigation. Vision SAGAR's focus included to counter threats including terrorism, piracy, trafficking, and illegal fishing. The policy also assists Ocean States with their economic and security needs including through grants and Indian Lines of Credit. Vision SAGAR further focuses on strengthening the defence and maritime capabilities of friendly countries in IOR. Under Vision SAGAR, India provided assets, manpower, and customized training to partner countries. It also promoted regional cooperation through platforms including Colombo Security Conclave and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). The policy emphasizes humanitarian aid, disaster relief, and people-to-people connections.

Vision MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions) was announced in March 2025 during PM Modi's State Visit to Mauritius. It builds on Vision SAGAR and expands its scope from the Indian Ocean to the wider Global South. Vision MAHASAGAR focuses on trade, development cooperation, capacity building, sustainable growth and mutual security for the broader Global South for a shared future. It suggests a framework that builds on India's outlook for the G20 - essentially looking further afield to build a community of shared values and aspirations among developing nations of the Global South.

1.31 This vision highlights India's role as a trusted development and security partner committed to a shared and inclusive future for the Global South. Thus, the MAHASAGAR vision essentially expands the reach and range of our engagements, to cover the entire Global South, and burnish our credentials as a global player.

1.32 The Committee also were keen to learn about the challenges faced in implementing the Security and Growth for All (SAGAR) doctrine along with the progress made and notable achievements. In a written reply, the Ministry stated that India has been advancing its bilateral and multilateral partnerships in line with SAGAR *i.e.* Security and Growth for All in the Region. SAGAR doctrine has promoted security and stability. India has been

extending developmental assistance, offered capacity building programmes, HADR support and defence and maritime security cooperation with an aim to assist countries in the Indian Ocean Region on their socio-economic development. India has been the 'First Responder' in the region offering timely and effective HADR support and has extended its capacities to respond to natural disasters and man-made accidents. India has also established itself as the net security provider in the IOR. The Indian Navy has been part of anti-piracy patrols in the sea routes of the Indian Ocean. India has undertaken projects to help enhance the coastal and EEZ surveillance capacity of the Indian Ocean Island states.

1.33 Elucidating the distinction between SAGAR and MAHASAGAR doctrines , the representatives of the Ministry of External Affairs testified before the Committee on 17 June 2025 and said:

“Vision SAGAR was officially launched by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in March 2015 during a ceremony in Port Louis in Mauritius. The objective of Vision SAGAR was to safeguard Indian India's interests in the IOR and ensure safety security and stability as well as freedom of navigation. The focus included countering threats such as terrorism, piracy, trafficking, and illegal fishing. The policy also assists Indian Ocean states with their economic and security needs including through Indian lines of credit and grants. It also focuses on strengthening the defence and maritime capabilities of friendly countries. We saw a large list in the presentation made by the Navy. Under Vision SAGAR India also provides assets manpower and customized training to partner countries. It also promotes regional cooperation through platforms such as the Colombo Security Conclave, the IORA, IONS, BIMSTEC and also engagement with QUAD countries On the other hand MAHASAGAR which was announced in March 2025 during the Prime Minister's State visit to Mauritius Builds on the SAGAR approach in terms of economic and strategic depth extends India's engagement beyond the Indian Ocean region to the entire global south including Africa, the Indo-Pacific region in general, Latin America and Pacific Island nations. The vision emphasizes a larger agenda including mutual security, economic growth, sustainable development and aiming to foster deeper cooperation across trade technology interestingly, which was not there in the original SAGAR Vision, maritime security and capacity building. It also seeks to amplify the voice of developing countries in global governance and policy making forums such as the G20, BRICS and the

UN etc. It also highlights India's role as a trusted development partner committed to a shared and inclusive future for the global South.”

1.34 India’s approach to the region is based on a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific. It lays emphasis on respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations in the region, peaceful resolution of disputes, avoidance of use or threat of use of force, and adherence to international laws, rules and regulations.

b. Indo Pacific and Indian Ocean Region as a continuum

1.35 On being asked about the difference between Indian Ocean Policy and Indo-Pacific Policy, the Ministry stated that India’s Indian Ocean Policy draws from India’s concept of Indo-Pacific that was articulated in Prime Minister’s keynote address at Shangri La Dialogue in June 2018. It is a wider implementation of the doctrine of SAGAR announced by PM in 2015 for the Indian Ocean Region and our Act East Policy. India’s concept of Indo-Pacific is based on the following:

- It calls for a free, open and inclusive order in the Indo-Pacific, based upon respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations, peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue and adherence to international rules and laws.
- It is inclusive in nature, and supports an approach that respects the right to freedom of navigation and overflight for all in the international seas.
- It is based on cooperation and collaboration, given the need for shared responses to shared challenges in the region and is premised upon the principle of ‘ASEAN-Centrality’.

1.36 On this issue, the representatives of the Ministry of External Affairs during testimony before the Committee on 18 December 2025 submitted as under:

“In our view, it is really a continuum and the challenges that are faced in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean are very similar. And as was pointed out by so many of the hon. Members, the threats from malign

actors, shall we say without naming countries which are there in the Pacific, are also there in the Indian Ocean. So, our responses have to factor that in.”

1.37 The Committee also desired to know about the allocation of resources for implementing India’s Indian Ocean strategy in the past ten years, and how these resources are being utilized for its effective execution. The Ministry replied that in the last 10 years, Government of India, has allocated various resources *inter-alia* financial, human resources, infrastructure support, capacity building, development cooperation with the objective to implement India’s Indian Ocean Strategy through cooperation and collaboration with like-minded and neighbouring countries in the region bilaterally and multilaterally.

1.38 The allocation of resources extends across multiple Ministries, including MEA, MOD, DEA (MoF), M/o Shipping & Waterways etc. As far as MEA is concerned, our development cooperation initiatives are supported through Lines of Credit extended through EXIM Bank, Grants-in-Aid through the Aid budget, and capacity-building through the ITEC budget.

1.39 When asked whether the role of Small Island States has been factored in India’s Indian Ocean strategy/policy, the Ministry stated that India factors in all considerations with regard to partners while formulating strategies/policies. India engages with all like-minded countries in the IOR both bilaterally and in multilateral platforms. In fact, the MAHASAGAR vision encompasses support for Pacific Island Countries (PICs) and also small island states in the Caribbean, in addition to those in the Indian Ocean Region.

1.40 When asked about the perception of the IOR countries towards India as a ‘net security provider’ in the Indian Ocean Region, the Ministry responded that Security and development are two center pieces of India’s foreign policy in the Indian Ocean region. India has established itself as the net security provider in the IOR. Some of the activities that India carries out in Indian Ocean Region include:

- Deploying ships for maritime security and anti-piracy operations in Western Indian Ocean (Gulf of Aden, Red Sea and Gulf of Oman)

- Conducting joint EEZ surveillance exercises with several countries including Maldives, Mauritius and Seychelles.
- Carrying out coordinated patrols in areas of interest where illicit maritime activities are known to be higher.
- Participating in variety of multilateral and plurilateral initiatives to enhance the regional maritime security along with partner nations.
- Information sharing through Information Fusion Centre (IFC-IOR) at Gurugram to enable a greater regional maritime security.

These are some of the activities that have led to a positive perception of India as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region.

CHAPTER II

MARITIME SECURITY AND STRATEGY IN INDIAN OCEAN REGION

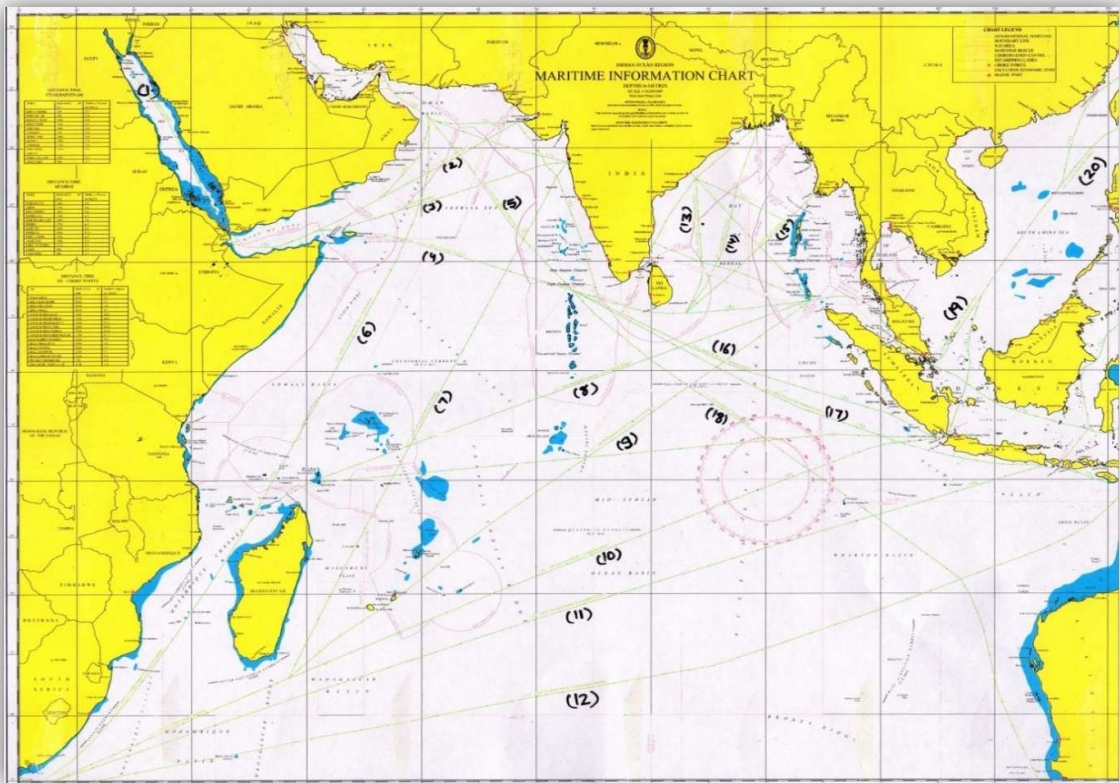
India's strategic location at the heart of the Indian Ocean, with a coastline stretching over 11,098 km and an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of approximately 2.4 million square kilometers, grants it significant influence over maritime security dynamics in the region. With nine coastal states and four island territories, India commands a maritime domain that is both vast and resource rich. The expansive sea area is a reservoir of natural resources and is extensively used for exploring, exploiting, conserving and managing ocean resources like fishing, ocean mining, drilling for oil & gas etc.

2.2 India's maritime footprint extends beyond its immediate coastline, reaching over 12,000 km, from the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf in the west to the South China Sea and the Australian coast in the east. This extensive coverage places India at the crossroads of key maritime trade routes and strategic chokepoints, making maritime security a vital component of its national security architecture.

2.3 Over the last three decades, economic growth around much of the Indian Ocean littoral has been rapid. Australia, Southeast Asia, India, the Middle East, East Africa, and Southern Africa have all enjoyed robust growth. In this context, trade flows through the region have rapidly increased in volume. Economically, the Indian Ocean's shipping routes are increasingly vital arteries of global economic activity and are set to become much busier in the 21st Century. The key International Shipping Lanes passing through the Indian Ocean are as follows:

1. Suez to Aden
2. Aden to Kutch
3. Aden to Mumbai
4. Aden to Male Atolls
5. Gulf Of Oman to Male Atolls
6. Cape Of Good Hope to Gulf Of Oman
7. Cape Of Good Hope to Mumbai
8. Mozambique Channel to Malacca Strait

9. Cape Of Good Hope to Malacca Strait
10. Cape Of Good Hope to Sunda Strait
11. Cape Of Good Hope to Lombok Strait
12. Cape Of Good Hope to Ombai And Wetar
13. Colombo to Vishakhapatnam
14. Colombo to Dhaka
15. Colombo to Yangon
16. Male Atolls to Sunda Strait
17. Male Atolls to Lombok Strait
18. Male Atolls to Australia
19. Singapore Strait to Taiwan Strait
20. Sunda Strait to Taiwan.



2.4 Highlighting the significance of the Indian Ocean for India's maritime security, the Ministry of External Affairs submitted that the Indian Ocean is vital for India's maritime security. India has an extensive coastline of 7500 km and over 1300 islands between Lakshadweep in the west and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands in the east. India is not only geographically connected to the Indian Ocean Region but shares civilizational and cultural links with the countries in Indian Ocean. Throughout history, the Indian

Ocean Region has been characterized by commercial flows, alongside migration of people, ideas and cultures. Economically, India has a vast Exclusive Economic Zone of 2.4 million square kilometers and 90% of India's trade by volume and almost all of India's oil imports come through the sea. Almost a hundred thousand ships a year pass through waters of Indian Ocean, carrying about half of the world's container shipments, one-third of the world's bulk cargo traffic and two-thirds of the oil shipments. Three quarters of this traffic is headed for destinations beyond the region. It is the medium that connects the producers of the Gulf and Western Indian Ocean to the consumers of South and East Asia and vice-versa. India's priorities and efforts are aimed at developing an Indian Ocean community that is stable and prosperous, strong and resilient, and which is able to cooperate closely within and to respond to happenings beyond the ocean. It is thus important to maintain the Indian Ocean as a free, open and inclusive space based on the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS), as the Constitution of the Seas.

2.5 During the course of oral evidence before the Committee on 17 June 2025, the representative of Indian Navy spelt out India's maritime interests as under:

“...the principal amongst our interest is ensuring the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country, promoting the safety and security of our citizens, shipping, fishing, trade, energy supplies etc which flow across the maritime domain is also another vital interest. While we pursue peace, stability and security in our maritime zones and concurrently, preserve and project other national interests, those have to be furthered in a dynamic, complex and often volatile environment posing a host of challenges...”

I. CHALLENGES AND THREAT PERCEPTION

2.6 Despite its strategic and economic value, the IOR faces a range of traditional and non-traditional threats that complicate maritime security. The Committee enquired whether there has been any change in the traditional and non-traditional threats in the Indian Ocean region. In response, the

Ministry of External Affairs submitted that the traditional and non-traditional threats in the Indian Ocean Region include maritime terrorism, smuggling, transnational crimes, drug-trafficking, illegal immigration, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, piracy, unregulated private maritime security companies and proliferation of contraband items. It is further compounded by natural disasters, oil spills and effects of climate change, to which Indian Ocean Region is highly prone.

2.7 The Ministry of Defence was also asked to enumerate the key challenges faced by India in the Indian Ocean Region and efforts taken to tackle them. In a written submission the Ministry stated that the Indian Navy faces multifaceted challenges in the IOR, encompassing traditional security threats from Naval competition, territorial disputes and growing Chinese naval presence, alongside non-traditional challenges like piracy, trafficking, illegal fishing, maritime terrorism, natural calamities and complex geopolitical dynamics. Further, on an average, over 1,65,000 ships traverse the Indian Ocean annually. At any given point of time, at least 15,000 ships are being monitored by IMAC and IFC-IOR. Additionally, with a coastline of over 11,000 km consisting of nearly 1400 islands, nine coastal states and four union territories, a significant responsibility is imposed on the Indian Navy.

2.8 The Ministry also stated that Mission based deployments in Areas of Interest across the IOR are undertaken to safeguard national maritime interests. Regular large-scale exercises, such as Theatre Level Operational Readiness Exercise (TROPEX), and fleet deployments are conducted to test combat readiness, review capabilities and address shortfalls. Further, persistent air surveillance is maintained, in the Area of Responsibility to develop comprehensive Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA).

2.9 For addressing non-traditional Threats, a comprehensive approach is adopted, primarily under the 'Strategy for Shaping a Favourable and Positive Maritime Environment' for addressing such threats. IN employs its constabulary, diplomatic and benign roles, which involves conduct of anti-piracy missions, anti-narcotics operations, Coordinated Patrols (CORPAT) with maritime neighbours, coastal and EEZ patrol/ surveillance,

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) and Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations (NEO) to address such threats.

a) Traditional Security Threats

2.10 The Indian Ocean Region is vital to China for its great power ambitions. Its search for energy, mineral resources and its compulsion to look for newer market for finished goods has led China to increase its engagement with IOR littorals. Therefore, consistent presence of People's Liberation Army (Navy) *i.e.* PLA (N) in the IOR, is a strategic imperative for China, In a written submission, the Ministry of Defence mentioned the broad contours of Chinese efforts in the IOR as follows:

(a) PLA (N) is undergoing a significant capability accretion and has commissioned over 15 units per year in the last decade. PLA (N) has already surpassed United States (Navy) as the largest Navy in the world through an accelerated construction program, Two Carrier Battle Groups are operational and a third and much more potent Aircraft Carrier Fujian, is at an advanced stage of pre-commissioning trials. With this capability augmentation, China has been consolidating its position in the IOR through frequent deployments of PLA (N) ships, submarines and aircraft. In the past decade, Chinese deployment in the IOR have seen a considerable rise, Chinese submarines are also known to have frequently been deployed in IOR since 2013.

(b) Further, a number of Chinese quasi military vessels, including research survey and satellite tracking vessels have been operating in the IOR. Dedicated efforts are being made in deep sea exploration for mining rare earth minerals towards niche technologies, in 2024, 20 Chinese Research vessels operated in IOR for a duration of 862 days, which has been the highest number of days since 2020.

(c) China continues to pursue and progress its investments, both in our immediate maritime neighbourhood as also in Africa by creating

dependencies through development of commercial and military infrastructure.

(d) In 2024, PLA (N) ships have made 22 port calls in IOR countries and undertaken military exercises with IOR littorals, China is engaging considerably in Africa and exploiting the opportunity to fill the power void created specifically in West Africa, due to diminishing European Union influence. In addition, high level delegation visits are also carried out by China to influence the politico military leadership.

2.11 Pakistan Navy is also undergoing a major capability development program with induction of four type 054 A/P frigate from China, four MILGEM Class Corvettes from Turkiye and eight Hangor (Yuan Class Air Independent Propulsion Capable submarines from China, state of the art aircraft and unmanned assets, among others.

2.12 With regard to the extent of inroads made by China in the Indian Ocean region, the Ministry of External Affairs stated that China has expanded its naval power in the Indian Ocean Region by increased numbers and duration of deployments. This has been facilitated by establishing a military base in Djibouti in 2017 and creation of dual-use infrastructure astride critical maritime choke points in the IOR to serve logistics support functions. As part of this strategy, China is also developing ports and other infrastructure facilities in the littoral countries of the IOR, including in the vicinity of India's maritime boundary and has a stated goal of becoming a maritime power.

2.13 China has also made attempts to expand its footprint in the Indian Ocean Region through various activities such as Forum for Development of Indian Ocean Island Countries, China-Indian Ocean Region Forum on Development Cooperation, Global Development Initiative, Marine Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Alliance in Indian Ocean Region, International Organisation of Mediation, among others. This is in addition to undertaking several infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road Initiative with focus on ports, logistics and airport related sectors for their dual usage purpose. There are concerns in the international community surrounding transparency

involved in project financing and have resulted in debt burden for host countries.

2.14 China has also been expanding cooperation with countries in the region on the pretext of scientific research and academic linkages in particular in archaeology, hydrography and oceanography, remote sensing and sharing of satellite images. Increase in deployment of research and survey vessels visiting IOR is aimed at collecting sensitive oceanography and marine data of the region. India has been working closely with partner countries in the region and sensitizing them on Chinese activities and its long-term implications for their internal and regional security.

2.15 In response to the Committee's query about India's assessment of the strategic implications of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the String of Pearls strategy in the Indian Ocean Region, the Ministry of Defence stated that China has maintained presence since 2008 in IOR under pretext of Anti-piracy operations. Chinese Research vessels, Satellite Tracking Ships and Deep-Sea Fishing boats are increasingly deployed in IOR. From a maritime security standpoint, India regards the BRI and the String of Pearls strategy, as attempts to reshape the strategic geography by diluting India's maritime influence in the IOR and altering it in China's favour. China is increasingly trying to gain foothold in the region to pursue its vested interests and gain strategic leverage over the resources. Overall, these actions would be detrimental to India's economic growth which is linked to the seas.

2.16 Regarding the steps taken to safeguard India's interests in the region considering increased Chinese presence, the Ministry of Defence submitted that the Indian Navy is aware about the security implications of Chinese presence in IOR. Own Concept of operations are continuously fine-tuned and capability perspective plans are formulated to cater for potential threats. The commissioning of INS Vikrant and the continued modernisation of our submarine fleet, including nuclear-powered submarines, is aimed at ensuring that we retain a credible deterrence in the region. The Navy's anti-submarine warfare capabilities have also been significantly enhanced with induction of ASW corvettes, P8I Long Range Maritime Reconnaissance aircraft and the

MH60R helicopters. Whole of government efforts are being pursued to augment Under Water Domain (UDA) awareness in the region. Our focus on building robust relationships with IOR littoral states through capacity-building initiatives and defence diplomacy is aimed at ensuring regional security. Indian Navy's emphasis on enhancing its operational readiness, maintaining credible Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) and fostering littoral partnerships ensures that we are well-prepared to meet any security threats in the region.

2.17 On the Committee's specific query regarding encroachment in the Indian Ocean by vessels/alleged fishing vessels of other countries, the Ministry of External Affairs submitted that the Government has taken note of reports indicating presence of vessels of other countries in Indian Ocean. Government keeps a close watch on all developments having a bearing on our national security and takes necessary measures to safeguard it. Appropriate steps are taken to safeguard the sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of the country. China has been undertaking several infrastructure projects focusing on ports, airport and logistics sector for dual use purpose, and deploying research and survey vessels in the region to augment maritime domain awareness and collect sensitive oceanography and marine data of the region.

2.18 When asked about the threat arising from misuse of the IOR, particularly by the vessels which are being used for fishing for smuggling of arms and drugs, the Ministry stated that the Government keeps a close watch on all developments having a bearing on our national security and takes necessary measures to safeguard it. Appropriate steps are taken to safeguard the sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of the country. India is helping its maritime neighbours set up their coastal surveillance networks for developing shared Maritime Domain Awareness. India has signed White Shipping Agreements with a number of countries. In addition, our ships have undertaken coordinated patrolling and EEZ Surveillance on the request of our partners. Another element of ensuring safety of navigation in the IOR has been the hydrographic support provided to our partners to chart the waters of the

region. India has established Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) for real time information exchange towards enhancing maritime security.

b) Non-Traditional Security Threats

2.19 The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) faces a range of non-traditional security threats that pose significant challenges to regional stability and national security. Among these, piracy has resurfaced as a critical concern, especially following attacks by Houthi militants in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. While tendering evidence before the Committee, the representative of Indian Navy also highlighted the attacks of Houthis:

“Under this complexity, the region also witnesses volatility across various parts, for instance, attacks on shipping by the Houthis in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. Shown on screen is the Bab al-Mandab Strait at the end of the Gulf of Aden, joining the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. The Houthi attacks were concentrated in an area north and west of the Bab al-Mandab. As a consequence of these attacks, a large part of international shipping opted to route around Africa, leading to increased transit time and consequent costs. This volatility also led to a consequent rise and resurgence of piracy. While multinational and Indian naval efforts over many years, since 2008, had reduced piracy to a certain extent, the instability that the Houthi attacks brought around in this region led to the resurgence of piracy. The heat map of incidents in the past year is as shown on the screen, with each red dot representing a piracy incident. Apart from piracy, other non-traditional challenges also persist across a wide part of the region.

2.20 The drug trafficking menace in IOR intersects with an array of security issues for the littoral states. The money generated from the trade helps to run a parallel economy that is being used to finance terrorism and criminal activities, affecting India’s national security and region security dynamics. As a Preferred Security Partner in IOR, Indian Armed Forces regularly conduct Anti-Narcotics Operations (ANO) in coordination with various agencies. In the last three years, Indian Maritime Law Enforcements Agencies have conducted

several successful ANOs, resulting in seizure of narcotics worth over Rs. 30,000 crores.

2.21 Given the growing threat from narcotics trafficking in the Indian Ocean, the Committee asked about the measures that have been taken to address this issue. In a written submission, the Ministry of Defence stated that both the Indian Navy and the Indian Coastal Guard (ICG) are committed to tackle threats emanating from narcotics trafficking in the Indian Ocean Region. Recently, surge in drug trafficking has been observed in 2024, wherein, the Indian Navy undertook four Anti-Narcotics Operations, seizing narcotics worth approx INR 40, 000 Crores in comparison to approx INR 20,000 Crores between 2021 – 2023. Overall, in the last five years, 10 Anti-Narcotics Operations have been undertaken resulting in the seizure of 11,859 Kg of narcotics. ICG has also been undertaking both independent and joint anti-smuggling operations with key agencies viz. Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), Anti-terrorism squad (ATS) Gujarat and local police which has resulted in successful seizure of significant quantities of narcotics at sea.

2.22 ICG undertakes regular Community Interaction Programmes (CIPs) in coastal areas with Fishing Community in order to sensitize them about the same. ICG also has representative in the Study group of Best Practices evolved by other countries on the issue transnational drug trafficking through maritime routes formulated by NCB.

2.23 Given that around 90% of India's trade by volume, including nearly all oil imports, transits through the Indian Ocean and half of the global container shipments, a third of bulk cargo, and two-thirds of oil shipments is handled by it, the Committee were keen to learn about the measures that have been taken to ensure maritime security of the region, countering piracy, combating illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, maritime terrorism and maritime criminal activities in coordination with other nations in the region. The Ministry of External Affairs responded that India aims to contribute to regional maritime security and is working to ensure the safety and security of maritime traffic through the ocean by strengthening skills and logistics of our

Indian Ocean neighbours. We are helping our maritime neighbours set up their coastal surveillance networks for developing shared Maritime Domain Awareness. We have signed White Shipping Agreements with a number of countries. In addition, our ships have undertaken coordinated patrolling and EEZ Surveillance on the request of our partners. Another element of ensuring safety of navigation in the IOR has been the hydrographic support provided to our partners to chart the waters of the region. This has been augmented with a large training and capacity building effort.

2.24 The diverse nature of the challenges before us requires effective partnerships, both at the regional as well as multilateral level. India considers the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) as an important instrument for achieving peace and security in the region. The focus of the IORA on maritime safety and security promotes a shared understanding of maritime issues and helps develop cooperative mechanisms.

2.25 In addition to the ASEAN and IORA mechanisms, the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), of which India is a founding member, offers a broad-based platform for developing greater synergies with the Navies in the region. We also have well-established mechanisms like Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery (ReCAAP) and Contact Group on piracy off Somalia (CGPCS), and anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden at the western extremity of this ocean.

2.26 India has established Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) for real time information exchange towards enhancing maritime security.

2.27 India also participates in other multilateral and plurilateral initiatives in the Indo-Pacific region to enhance the regional maritime security along with partner nations. These include the Djibouti Code of Conduct-Jeddah Amendment (DCOC-JA), Contact Group on Illicit Maritime Activities (CGIMA), Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), QUAD Maritime Security Working Group (QMSWG), BIMSTEC, ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+), and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum.

India has steered several maritime security dialogues including India-Australia Maritime Security Dialogue, India-Myanmar Maritime Security Dialogue etc.

2.28 India has steered several maritime security dialogues including India-Australia Maritime Security Dialogue, India-Myanmar Maritime Security Dialogue etc. Some of the MoU/agreements on defence and security cooperation between India and IOR countries include:

Country	MoUs	Year of signing
Mauritius	Hydrography	1974
Seychelles	Defence Cooperation	2003
	Coastal Radar System	2012
	Operational training and maintenance	2013
	Hydrography	2015
Comoros	Defence Cooperation	2019
Madagascar	Defence cooperation	2018

(Ref: Replies to List of Points Pg 30)

2.29 From the above list, the Committee observed that India has signed MoUs/agreements on defence and security cooperation with only a few countries of the IOR viz, Mauritius, Seychelles, Comoros and Madagascar. On being asked about the reasons along with the MoUs/agreements in the pipeline, the Ministry stated that the Government of India has signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) and agreements on defence and security cooperation with Sri Lanka, Madagascar, Myanmar and Bangladesh in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Other than the aforesaid MoUs, Government of India provides necessary support including defence assets, training and capacity building, assistance in tackling maritime challenges and HADR support. Given the trust and long-standing cooperation, India is positioned as the ‘net security provider’ in the region.

2.30 On the Committee’s query about utilization of advanced algorithms, big data analytics, or AI- based systems to predict maritime security threats in the IOR, the Ministry stated that at present, Indian Navy is leveraging AI/ ML capabilities using commercially contracted services such as M/s Windward

Analytics and Lloyds Sea Searcher. The Baseline Tool of the NC3I network, MDA-DSS (Sangraha) is envisaged to incorporate ML capabilities. Indian Navy is also pursuing development of the following analytical platforms with AI/ML capabilities such as NMDA Baseline Tool (M/s BEL), DeepDarshak (M/s Crimson Energy Experts) and IFC-IOR Analytical Tool (WEESEE / BEL). Whereas, for ICG, the major source of MDA data is through coastal Chain of Radar and Static Sensors, National AIS chain, satellite AIS chain, satellite AIS, fisheries tracking & registration data and various other inputs from different sources. This MDA data is analysed through Decision Support Software with AI capabilities to flag suspicious vessels.

II. MARITIME POLICY AND STRATEGY IN IOR

2.31 The Naval Commander in Chiefs (C-in-Cs) as C-in-Cs Coastal Defence coordinate the operations with Indian Coastal Guard (ICG) and coastal state marine police, complemented suitably by the Indian Naval Ships and aircrafts. The National Command, Control, Communications and Intelligence Network (NC31) interconnecting 51 Indian Navy and Coast Guard stations is functioning effectively and integrates the information available through Coastal Security Network, National AIS chain, LRIT system, Space based AIS, Merchant Shipping Information (MSIS), World Registry of Shipping (WRS) and Vessel and Air Traffic Management Systems (VATMs). The Joint Operation Centres (JOCs) set up at Mumbai, Kochi, Vishakhapatnam and Port Blair (manned by Indian Navy, Coast Guards and police personnel at all times) are also fully integrated and functioning effectively.

2.32 In order to validate various measures that have been instituted towards enhancing maritime security since 26/11, pan India maiden Coastal Defence exercise 'Sea Vigil' was conceptualized in 2018. Coastal security being a major sub-set of coastal defence construct, the concept of sea vigil is to activate, inter alia, the coastal security apparatus pan India and assess the overarching coastal defence mechanism. The latest edition of Exercise Sea Vigil was conducted from 20-21 November 2024. The exercise involving mobilization of a large number of coastal security assets is facilitated by

concerned central ministries and all coastal states/union territories and maritime security stakeholders (including the coastal population and fishing communities. This has provided an effective inter-agency mechanism to facilitate smooth transition of the entire coastal security mechanism to higher states of security preparedness.

2.33 During the course of oral evidence before the Committee on 17 June 2025, the representative of Indian Navy spelt out as under:

“Coming to coastal security, the Indian Navy is responsible for overall maritime security, while the Indian Coast Guard, State Marine Police, CISF, and a host of other agencies have specific responsibilities as well. We understand that coastal security involves a whole-of-government approach, and over 40 ministries and agencies are involved in the overall ambit. We maintain close cooperation and coordination with multiple agencies, including the NSCS, MEA, MHA, MOPS&W, MOP&G, Department of Fisheries, etc., with a thrust on ensuring coordinated action towards coastal security. Towards this end, to evaluate how effectively we are able to ensure our security, we conduct a biennial Exercise Sea Vigil. This is a nationwide exercise where all coastal States, Union Territories, and stakeholders across multiple Ministries and agencies are activated simultaneously. The last exercise lasted over nine days, which included a tactical phase where nominated units and personnel attempted breaching the security layers. The exercise also included a multi-agency evaluation of readiness led by a joint Indian Naval, Indian Coast Guard, and NSCS team. We undertook a security audit of almost 950 locations to identify vulnerability vulnerabilities and to formulate mitigating measures for coastal security gaps.”

2.34 Adding further the representatives of Indian Navy during testimony stated:

“In this complex scenario, we ensure India’s maritime security through a clearly articulated strategy. Guided by the MoD, our strategy comprises of five constituent strategies, namely a strategy for deterrence, a strategy for conflict, strategy for shaping a favourable and positive maritime environment, strategy for coastal and offshore security, and finally, a strategy for maritime force and capability development. All of these strategies are pursued through four roles, namely military, constabulary, benign, and diplomatic.”

2.35 In view of the rapid realignment in geo strategic outlook, the Defence Secretary made the following submission before the Committee on 17 June 2025:

“India’s maritime strategy has undergone an evolution, with the Indian Ocean Region emerging as a strategic space for security, engagement and influence. We have been engaging with littoral States of IOR and practicing the policies of ‘Neighbourhood First’ and ‘Act East’ and Indian initiatives towards promotion of peace and stability in IOR includes enhanced domain awareness, shared intelligence, engagements through training and exercises, and capacity building of our regional partners. India has adopted a multi-pronged approach to enhance cooperation and with our maritime neighbours, including Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bangladesh, Seychelles, Mauritius, Myanmar, the ASEAN nations, South West Littorals of Indian Ocean (SWIO) and the African nations. Our efforts in this regard include joint patrols, Exclusive Economic Zone surveillance, hydrographic surveys and capacity building programmes with the partner navies.

Indian Law Enforcements Agencies including the Navy have consistently remained as First Responder in the region as is evident from our Armed Forces proactive assistance to friendly foreign countries during crises, such as, Op Brahma (Myanmar), Cyclone Chido (Mauritius), Op Kaveri for (evacuation of Indian citizens from Sudan) and Op Karuna (Myanmar). We have also ensured the building of Maritime Domain Awareness through well-established linkages with Friendly Foreign Countries through the Network for Information Sharing (NISHAR), Combined Enterprise Regional Information Exchange System as well as through deployment of our surface and air platforms.

MAHASAGAR is a declaration of intent and a call for greater inclusivity and outreach with stronger partnerships to undertake deterrence against common maritime security challenges.

Several key initiatives are also underway such as Mission Sagar, conduct of Multi-Lateral Exercises like MILAN and SAREX, positive contributions to the IONS and IORA that you had mentioned, Exercise AIKEYME with East African nations and Indian Ocean Ship Sagar in South West Littorals of Indian Ocean are these reflect our commitment for regional growth and stability. Our Indian Ocean strategy also prioritizes protection of trade. Our Naval Forces undertook sustained Maritime Security Operations in the Arabian Sea during the Houthi crisis to ensure safe transit of Indian flagged merchant vessels to or

from Indian ports. We have continued to maintain regular presence and surveillance in India's Maritime 'Areas of Interest' through the concept of Mission Based Deployments (MBDs) and address military challenges, tackle contingencies such as Anti-piracy, Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief (HADR) and Search and Rescue (SAR)."

III. ROLE OF INDIAN NAVY IN IOR

2.36 India's strategic stakes in the Indian Ocean have grown substantially, necessitating a robust and forward-looking maritime force. The Indian Navy (IN), complemented by the Indian Coast Guard (ICG), plays a central role in securing India's maritime borders, safeguarding vital sea lanes, and contributing to regional stability. Elaborating on the strategic and operational role, the Indian Navy (IN) submitted that it has four classical roles namely military, diplomatic, constabulary, and to 'safeguard India's National Maritime interests at all times'. Whereas preventing war and conflict is its primary purpose, the Indian Navy plays a decisive role in bringing them to an early and favourable conclusion, should they be thrust on the nation or become inevitable. Apart from the traditional threats, non-traditional threats such as terrorism, piracy, robbery, IUU (Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated) fishing, human/ arms/ drugs trafficking etc, also necessitates intervention by Indian Navy.

2.37 Indian Navy also ensures and enables maritime security in the maritime zones of India and beyond, establishing an environment conducive for the unhindered conduct of trade, shipping, fishing, offshore exploration and other maritime interests, that are vital for economic growth and national development. Indian Navy complements the nation's effort for energy security, by providing round the clock vigilance along our Sea Lines of Communication. Accordingly, Indian Navy maintains a close watch on all naval/ maritime activities of our adversaries in our maritime regions of interest and acts as required to signal our capability and intent.

2.38 Based on the written as well as oral submissions before the Committee, the role and involvement of Indian Navy in the Indian Ocean Region can be summarized as under:

Role	Objective	Strategy
Military	Deterring inimical actions against India and protecting its national interests.	• Building credible capability • Enhancing maritime domain awareness • Maritime Air surveillance plan • Deployment of Mission based ship and surveillance aircraft.
Constabulary	Enforcing international maritime laws and security regimes.	• Deployment of capital ships with significant combat capability across dimensions-air, surface and sub-surface. • Anti-piracy operations • Anti-narcotics operations • Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) missions
Benign	Shaping international maritime environment favourable to India's interests.	Conducting humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, search and rescue and medical evacuation measures.
Diplomatic	Advancing India's interests through diplomatic engagement with maritime countries.	• Bilateral and multilateral maritime exercises • Information Fusion Centre Indian Ocean Region at Gurugram- fosters information exchange among the IOR littoral states and international treaty-bound organizations like the IMO, the UNODC, and Interpol, piracy reporting and monitoring centres with a regional or global outlook. • NISHAR (Network for Information Sharing) application facilitates the exchange of information with friendly foreign countries

		• White shipping and information exchange agreement
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2.39 The Indian Navy has been conducting numerous anti-piracy operations, maritime patrols/ escorts and other proactive engagements in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). When asked to elaborate on some of such major operations/ exercises conducted in the Indian Ocean Region in the last ten years, Ministry of Defence stated that the Indian Navy maintains around the year presence in vicinity of the following maritime areas: -

- (i) Gulf of Aden (Anti-Piracy Patrols). The Indian Navy maintains continuous presence in the piracy affected area of Gulf of Aden, Red Sea and East coast of Africa since 2008. This ensures a close watch on the activities of Chinese PLA (N) warships and Extra Regional Forces deployed in the region. A total of 128 ships have been deployed in the Gulf of Aden towards Anti-Piracy Patrols since October 2008.
- (ii) Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman (Op Sankalp). Consequent to the flaring up of tensions in Persian Gulf/ GoO (Gulf of Oman) region, Indian Navy launched 'Op Sankalp' in June 2019 towards safety and security as well as to provide assurance to the Indian Flagged Merchant Vessels (IFMVs) transiting through the Strait of Hormuz. This also helped IN to monitor Pakistan Navy activities in the North Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman and Persian Gulf, whilst strengthening bilateral relationships with Gulf countries.
- (iii) Approaches to Malacca Strait (MALDEP). Continuous presence has been maintained in approaches to Malacca strait, the Gateway to IOR, to undertake surveillance on and develop credible MDA in the region on Extra Regional Forces transiting in/ out of IOR.
- (iv) Central and South Indian Ocean (CENTDEP and SOUTHDEP). Indian Navy presence in the Central and Southern Indian Ocean region, enhances MDA, along with monitoring Chinese maritime activities and engaging with our maritime neighbours.

(v) Air Surveillance. Indian Navy long range maritime surveillance aircraft P8I and High-Altitude Long Endurance Remote Pilotless Aircraft (HALE RPA, Sea Guardian), have been extensively deployed for surveillance in IOR and within India's Maritime Zones to augment 'Domain Awareness and Understanding'.

2.40 On being asked the Ministry of Defence also responded to the way such operations contribute to regional security and cooperation with other countries maritime force.

- SAGAR' and 'MAHASAGAR'. Under Hon'ble Prime Minister's vision of Security And Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), IN continues to assist friendly maritime nations in capacity building and also undertakes flag-showing/ operational visits to friendly countries (IN warships have visited over 100 countries since independence). With the expansion of this vision to MAHASAGAR, in Mar 2025 by Hon'ble PM, IN is set to play an even larger diplomatic role across the regions.
- Engagement with Friendly Foreign Countries. IN maintains a proactive engagement with like-minded navies and maritime neighbours to augment MDA and monitoring of potential adversaries. Engagement with friendly foreign countries has also been promoted for regional and global stability, and has enhanced maritime security in the region. Some of the salient engagements with friendly foreign countries include the following: -
- Joint EEZ Surveillance. IN has provided maritime assistance for conducting EEZ surveillance patrols, hydrographic surveys, diving assistance, search and rescue and overseeing ship construction, which has enhanced the security and safety of international shipping passing through the region, emphasised good order and has enforced the international legal framework at sea. Joint EEZ surveillance of Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar and Mozambique is regularly undertaken based on host country's request.

- Coordinated Patrols. Coordinated Patrols (CORPATs) along respective International Maritime Boundary Lines (IMBL) are conducted with Indonesia, Thailand, Bangladesh and Myanmar on annual/ bi-annual basis. This has further synergised our understanding and operating procedures with our immediate maritime neighbours.
- Maritime Partnership Exercises with Friendly Foreign Countries. IN conducts both, regular and complex bilateral/ multilateral exercises with a large number of foreign navies to extend its operational footprint and develop interoperability while enhancing maritime security in the region.

2.41 The Committee further enquired about the operational successes and challenges faced during these engagements. As regards operational challenges, Ministry of Defence stated that since commencement of the Anti-piracy operations in 2008, 133 Indian Navy ships have been deployed for anti-piracy patrol and 3765 merchant ships have been safely escorted. To counter the growing threat to trade since October 2023, due to attacks by Houthis, IN has deployed more than 30 warships with integral helicopters, Marine Commandos and Specialist Explosive Ordnance Disposal Teams in the identified areas. In the ensuing deployments, Indian Navy has successfully thwarted 13 piracy incidents between October 2023 to June 2024, including apprehension of 62 pirates. Continued Maritime Security Operations in the Gulf of Aden/ Red Sea has ensured safe transit of more than 325 MVs carrying nearly 125 Lakh MT cargo/ oil, worth more than 5.4 Bn USD to India.

2.42 Indian Navy face differential challenges in terms of fleet readiness, personnel training and logistics. Inputs in respect of Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard are as follows:

- i) Personnel Training Challenges: India's expansion of Maritime Footprints would lead to rise in security challenges. It is imperative that awareness of such security challenges and SOPs for risk mitigation and counter actions is formally established in maritime education/ training/

skilling programmes. Regular certification on this aspect would ensure a significantly robust foundation for the country's maritime endeavours.

ii) Logistics Challenges: Key logistical challenges faced by the Indian Navy are as follows:

- Dependence on imports and vulnerabilities to embargoes which are being mitigated through Atmanirbhar Bharat initiatives and indigenisation.
- Management of vintage platforms and weapon systems.
- Logistical support, maintenance and repair challenges for distributed operations across vast swaths of IOR.
- Standardisation of equipment, weapons and sensors, to progressively reduce inventory variations to optimum levels. This would ensure optimum maintenance, repair, training, stock and spares, and logistics management.

iii) ICG also faces the challenges towards maintaining foreign origin equipment which are likely to get mitigated in future by increased induction of indigenous equipment in consonance with Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative. The Refit/ repairs capabilities are likely to get further fillip, once govt. approvals are accorded for development of limited captive technical capabilities.

iv) Training: ICG Officers and Enlisted personnel are undergoing basic and professional training with Tri- Services on regular basis. The annual/ biennial requirement of vacancies sought from IN/ IA/ IAF are being considered favourably.

v) Logistics: Dependence on imports for spares and maintenance of certain equipment poses logistics challenges.

2.43 As regards the way communication protocols have been standardized among the Indian Navy, Coast Guard, and other regional naval and maritime agencies, the Ministry furnished the following reply:

IN-ICG Communication Protocols: Indian Navy and ICG follow common communication protocols which are exercised from time to time. Both the services have various common/ compatible communication systems for

interoperability at sea. Further, for seamless coordination during joint operations, exercises and activities, MHA has promulgated a Common Communication Plan in September 2022. In addition, the National Command Control Communication and Intelligence (NC3I) Network, setup in the aftermath of 26/11 terrorist attacks, connects 51 operational centres of IN and ICG for seamless and secure communication.

Communication with Regional Naval/ Maritime Agencies. The Indian Navy has designed and developed MITRA (Maritime Information Terminal for Reciprocal Association) system with NISHAR (Network for Information Sharing) application. These terminals/ systems are being deployed on units of Friendly Foreign Countries during joint exercises for communication at sea, such as, during MILAN-24, IBSAMAR-24, VARUNA-25, AIKEYME and IOS SAGAR. Additionally, data communication equipment for operational level cooperation and MDA sharing with US Navy (CENTRIX) and French Navy (IN – FN link) have been installed at select Indian Navy centres.

2.44 The Committee specifically asked about MoD's assessment of the current operational strengths and preparedness of India's Navy and Coast Guard. In a written submission, the Ministry stated:

- Indian Navy. At present Indian Navy has a force level of 137 ships and submarines and 264 aircraft. These include aircraft carriers, state-of-the-art destroyers and frigates, nuclear and conventional submarines, carrier-based fighters, deck-based helicopters, shore-based surveillance aircraft and surface/ sub-surface/ aerial autonomous vehicles. Towards expeditious capacity and capability building of the Navy, 58 ships are presently under construction, to be inducted over the next six years. Besides, necessary initial approvals have been accorded for the construction of 62 additional ships and submarines
- Indian Coast Guard (ICG). ICG was established in 1978, under the Ministry MoD as Maritime Security and Law Enforcement Agency for protection of Maritime and other National Interests in Maritime Zones of India (MZI).

- ICG boasts a robust operational footprint, encompassing 42 stations, 12 Air Stations, 03 Maritime Rescue Coordination Centres (MRCCs), 36 Maritime Rescue sub-Centres (MRSCs) and Coastal Security Network (CSN) comprising of 84 Radar station as part of Chain of Static Sensors (CSS) along the vast coastline.
- ICG has a fleet of 151 indigenously built surface platforms and 78 aircraft, propelled by over 15,000 dedicated personnel.
- ICG presently deploys 18-20 ships, 30-35 craft and 10-12 aircraft every day in Indian EEZ, executing the vital charter. ICG units regularly participate in various joint exercise and operations with IN, including war fighting efforts in compliance with provisions of Union war book, IN war book and CG War book

2.45 When asked whether India is investing enough in naval modernization, particularly in the Indian Ocean Region, to ensure its maritime security and safeguard vital sea lanes of communication (SLOCs), the Ministry of Defence made the following written submission:

- Indian Navy Modernisation Plans and Capability Development. IN's modernisation plans are formulated in accordance with the Long Term Integrated Perspective Plan (LTIPP 2012-27) and Maritime Capability Perspective Plan (MCPPI 2022-37). Recent induction of Indigenous Aircraft Carrier Vikrant, SSBNs, Visakhapatnam Class destroyers, frigate Nilgiri, Scorpene Class submarines, MH60R multi-role helicopters and P8I and High Altitude Long Endurance aircraft are testimony to IN's focused approach towards a threat and capability based modernisation plan with a thrust on 'Aatmanirbharta'.
- Perspective plans include induction of state-of-the-art Next Generation warships, submarines, carrier-based fighters and induction of niche technology and equipment, including AI and Robotics, to address emergent and future threats.

- The IN's modernisation has been supported by consistent budgetary allocations, and a healthy capital to revenue ratio of 65:35, achieved in FY 2024-25, aptly reflects the capability-driven approach.

2.46 As regards the measures taken or is proposed to be taken to strengthen Naval and Coast Guard capacities, especially regarding upgrading naval fleets, providing special training to Coast Guards for effective interdiction of illicit activities, conducting combined maritime exercises, etc, the Ministry stated that Indian Navy's force modernisation is centred on Atmanirbharta. Towards expeditious capacity and capability building, 58 ships are presently under construction in various Indian shipyards. In addition, initial approvals have been accorded for construction of 62 ships and submarines, and 120 FICs (Fast Intercept Craft). With the ongoing modernisation, by 2040, average displacement of Fleet ships is envisaged to increase to 6000 Tons (from 4000 Tons in 2014) and only 20% of Fleet ships would be more than 15 years old (as compared to current 53%).

2.47 Ab-initio training for Officers and Sailors of ICG is being conducted by Indian Navy training establishments. Indian Navy also conducts specialisation training for ICG executive officers, aviation courses, seamanship training, etc. Additionally, Work Up (Operational Sea Training) of ICG ships is also conducted by IN (12 work ups conducted in 2024-25).

2.48 Indian Navy is an integral part of biannual coastal security Exercise Sagar Kavach, conducted by ICG, and likewise, ICG forms a part of pan India Coastal Defence Exercise, Sea Vigil, conducted by Indian Navy as lead service. Coordinated patrolling/ operations are undertaken during the deployments for higher Coastal Raksha States. Similarly, ICG, have signed contract for acquisition of Two (02) Pollution Control Vessels, Twenty-Two (22) Fast Patrol Vessels, one (01) Training Ship, six (06) Next Generation Offshore Patrol Vessels & Six (06) Air Cushion Vehicles with various ship builders. Further, initial approvals for acquisition of eight 08 Dornier, 06 Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH) Mk-III, 06 Multi-Mission Maritime Aircraft (MMA) and 04 Coast Guard Ship-borne Unmanned Aerial System (CGSUAS) have been accorded.

2.49 ICG regularly train its personnel in Boarding & Maritime Law Enforcement through structured courses at IN and ICG training establishments. In addition, ICG has concluded several MoUs with various national universities such as Gujarat Maritime Law University (GMLU), Gandhinagar and Rashtriya Raksha University (RRU), Gandhinagar for courses on Maritime Law towards effective interdiction of illicit activities and improving operational effectiveness in Coastal & Maritime Law Enforcement.

2.50 On being asked how can India's naval partnerships with countries like the United States, Australia, Japan, and other regional power be further strengthened to create a robust maritime security framework in the Indian Ocean, the Ministry of Defence responded that in order to create a robust maritime security framework in the Indian Ocean, following points are germane to further strengthen our naval partnerships with US, Australia, Japan and other regional powers: -

- Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA): MDA is critical for developing a common operational picture in the surface, air and sub-surface domains. Towards this, IFC-IOR plays a pivotal role in enhancing shared maritime awareness through real time data exchange with partner navies in the region. Additionally, for Underwater Domain Awareness (UDA), India is presently advancing its joint UDA frameworks with likeminded countries. Common platforms are being integrated into this framework to enhance interoperability.

- Interoperability: Multilateral and bilateral naval exercises with US, Japan, Australia etc foster interoperability and strengthen operational preparedness across IOR aligned with emerging threat landscapes, would ensure that navies remain well prepared to address the maritime security challenges.

- Co-development of Niche Technology: Cooperation in the domain of emerging technologies like AI and autonomous systems with US, Australia and Japan will further add teeth to the IN's operational capability.

2.51 Similarly, ICG is actively pursuing the formalisation of bilateral arrangements through Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs), including

those already signed with Japan and under discussion with the United States and Australia. These frameworks facilitate enhanced cooperation in maritime law enforcement, search and rescue (SAR), pollution response, and combating transnational maritime crimes. Promoting “White Hull Diplomacy” through capacity building and humanitarian outreach across IORA, BIMSTEC, and other regional groupings remains a strategic priority for the ICG.

2.52 In light of evolving threats and geopolitical dynamics in the IOR, the Committee were keen to learn about India’s long-term strategy to ensure maritime security and maintain regional stability. The Ministry of Defence responded as under:

- India’s long-term strategy in the maritime domain aims to counter threats like piracy, trafficking, illegal fishing, maritime terrorism, natural calamities and complex geopolitical dynamics by pursuing five distinct strategies given as under
- Shaping a favourable and Positive Maritime Environment to enhance cooperation with maritime forces of friendly nations. Additionally, IN will pursue its efforts to be the Preferred Security Partner and First Responder guided by the GoI’s vision of MAHASAGAR.
- Deterrence through capability, posture, and communication of intent
- Employment of India’s maritime forces during conflict.
- Building cooperative frameworks and coordinative mechanisms for coastal and offshore security.
- Building a combat ready navy to meet India’s future maritime security needs.
- The focus of the Indian Navy towards ensuring combat readiness, through successful surface, air and sub-surface firings, enabled ships to be deployed for Op SINDOOR within 96 hours of the terrorist attack, with hundreds of missiles embarked.
- Indian Navy focus is on building credible deterrence by modernising our Fleet with capable multi-dimensional platforms while also integrating emerging technologies to monitor and secure critical SLOCs and choke points.

2.53 Enumerating the key objectives that will guide India's naval and maritime policies in the coming decade, the Ministry of Defence stated that India's naval and maritime policies in the coming decade will be guided by the Indian Navy Vision 2047. These objectives also reinforce the overarching vision of 'MAHASAGAR' – or 'Mutual and Holistic Advancement of Security and Growth Across Regions' which signifies India's vision to expand its influence and impact globally, using the seas as a conduit. This will be pursued by the following guiding principles: -

- Support Govts nation building endeavours towards Viksit Bharat 2047.
- Establish India's salience in the maritime domain and reinforce our stature as the Preferred Security Partner and First Responder in the region.
- Develop a well-balanced force to dominate operations across all domains of naval warfare.
- Ensure credible deterrence by signalling capability, capacity and intent through the sea leg of the nuclear triad.
- Transform into an Aatmanirbhar force through leadership-driven focus on invention, innovation, indigenisation and integration of niche, disruptive and emerging technologies.

IV. MARITIME INFRASTRUCTURE

2.54 India has made significant strides in the development of maritime infrastructure in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), largely through initiatives like the Sagarmala Programme. On being asked about maritime infrastructure developed so far by India in the IOR including under the Sagarmala initiatives, MEA stated that Sagarmala is the flagship initiative of Government of India that aims to boost India's maritime sector by enhancing port connectivity, developing inland waterways, and promoting industrial growth.

2. 55 In Myanmar, under the Kaladan Multi modal Transit Transport Project, India has completed the waterways component, which includes the Sittwe Port inaugurated in 2023 and currently operated by India Ports Global Limited (IPGL). The roadways component consisting of 109 km road from

Paletwa to Zorinpui in Mizoram is under construction. Once completed the project will provide access to a sea-route to Northeast India via Myanmar.

2.56 India has also helped develop Khulna-Mongla Port Rail Line in Bangladesh under concessional Line of Credit. India is also developing the Colombo West Terminal in Sri Lanka and is helping upgrade facilities at Kankesanthurai Port in Northern Sri Lanka. India is also helping develop cargo-handling facilities at Chabahar Port in Iran, which will link with INSTC and enhance connectivity with Central Asian Republics.

2.57 Thus by enhancing connectivity and optimizing infrastructure, Government of India envisage promoting international trade in the IOR region. With the objective to enhance India's maritime competitiveness, Government of India has launched Sagarmala 2.0 to further develop the Sagarmala Programme.

2.58 On the Committee's specific query about military bases along Indian Ocean Region by major countries, the Ministry responded that no information is available.

2.59 India's efforts are not limited to physical infrastructure. India is also pioneering the development of Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA). In this arena, the Ministry of External Affairs stated that India is helping its maritime neighbours set up their coastal surveillance networks for developing shared Maritime Domain Awareness. India has set up Coastal Radar systems in Mauritius, Seychelles and Sri Lanka and is implementing more in Myanmar, Bangladesh, Maldives.

2.60 MEA also informed that India promotes White Shipping Information Exchange through our Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) in Gurugram, where Liaison Officers (LO) from 11 countries are deployed. We have also deployed/are deploying our LOs to regional IFCs in Singapore, Madagascar and Seychelles. India has provided Hydrographic Survey Support for Myanmar, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Mozambique, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Kenya.

2.61 Further, to enhance the Quad's collaboration and coordination with regional partners, the Indo- Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) was launched in 2022 as a technology and training initiative to enhance maritime domain awareness in the Indo-Pacific region. IPMDA harnesses innovative technology to provide partners across Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean region and the Pacific with near real-time information to rapidly detect and respond to a wide range of challenges involving illicit maritime activities such as illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, climate events, and humanitarian crises. Since then, the IPMDA initiative has been scaled to cover the Indian Ocean Region, through the integration of the Information Fusion Center- Indian Ocean Region, Gurugram in 2024. Quad countries also contribute to the region through capacity building cooperation for enhancing maritime security.

2.62 As regards the details and outcome of Joint EEZ surveillance exercise conducted in the Indian Ocean region so far, the Ministry stated that Joint EEZ Surveillance exercises have been conducted with countries in the IOR. They include:

- Seychelles (last in July 2024)
- Mauritius (last in November 2024)
- Mozambique (last in November 2024)

India also carries out coordinated patrols in areas of interest where illicit maritime activities are known to be high.

2.63 About the measures taken for the development of maritime infrastructure and institutionalization of cooperation in the IOR to counter security/ terrorist threats, the Ministry informed that India remains committed to extending port connectivity (part of maritime infrastructure) among the littoral states of the Indian Ocean and beyond. This is the objective behind the Sagarmala initiative, which aims to establish new ports and modernize old ones. Connectivity is one of the major themes of Shri Narendra Modi's 'Neighbourhood First' policy. India continues to work on a range of projects to improve maritime logistics in Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius and

Seychelles. Other initiatives include the Kaladan transport project leading to Sittwe port in Myanmar; the Trilateral Highway to Thailand; and, the Chabahar port project in Iran.

2.64 Also, India participates in variety of multilateral and plurilateral initiatives in the Indo-Pacific region to enhance the regional maritime security along with partner nations. These include the Djibouti Code of Conduct-Jeddah Amendment (DCOC-JA), Contact Group on Illicit Maritime Activities (CGIMA), Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), QUAD Maritime Security Working Group (QMSWG), Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships (ReCAAP), BIMSTEC, ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+), and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum.

2.65 Further, India's Information Fusion Centre, (IFC-IOR) at Gurugram is the foundation pillar for information sharing in all these constructs to enable a greater regional maritime security. India became a member of the Combined Maritime Forces in November 2023 to enable greater collaboration region maritime security among partner nations.

2.66 Given that monitoring of ship movement and intelligence sharing is crucial for maritime security in the IOR, MEA informed that India has established Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) for real time information exchange towards enhancing maritime security. India also participates in other multilateral and plurilateral initiatives in the Indo-Pacific region to enhance the regional maritime security along with partner nations. These include the Djibouti Code of Conduct-Jeddah Amendment (DCOC-JA), Contact Group on Illicit Maritime Activities (CGIMA), Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), QUAD Maritime Security Working Group (QMSWG), BIMSTEC, ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+), and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum. India has steered several maritime security dialogues including India-Australia Maritime Security Dialogue, India-Myanmar Maritime Security Dialogue etc.

CHAPTER 3

ROLE OF MULTILATERAL INSTITUTIONS AND REGIONAL GROUPINGS

India's engagement with multilateral organizations in the IOR is a strategic cornerstone of its foreign and security policy. Given India's geographical location, economic interest, maritime security concerns and aspirations of regional power, India actively participates in different multilateral groupings such as the Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI), Quad, Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) etc. that facilitate regional cooperation. Many of these initiatives have a direct relevance to the future of the Indian Ocean and contribute to the well-being and security of the maritime spaces and its littoral territories

(a) Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA): India is a founding member of the 23-member IORA, a regional grouping aimed at strengthening economic cooperation, maritime safety, and environmental security. India views the IORA as a platform for promoting sustainable development, economic growth and prosperity, and stability in the region. As the Vice-Chair of IORA for the term 2023-25 and as Chair in 2025-27, India's priority is on consolidating and streamlining efforts to promote cooperation in IORA, with particular emphasis on maritime safety and security, and blue economy.

(b) Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI): On November 04, 2019, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi launched the Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI) at the 14th East Asia Summit held in Bangkok, Thailand as an open, non-treaty based global initiative that seeks to manage, conserve, sustain, and secure the maritime domain. So far, 13 countries are part of the IPOI and are co-leading one of its 7 pillars. India has taken the lead on Maritime Security and DRM pillars of IPOI. We are also working with various like-minded countries who have come on-board to lead the other IPOI pillars.

(c) Mekong - Ganga Cooperation (MGC): India was the first to quantify the Mekong identity of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam under

the Mekong - Ganga Cooperation mechanism. The MGC is the first and the oldest of all Mekong initiatives. Developmental cooperation and strengthening of civilisational, cultural and people to people ties and connectivity is the mainstay of our approach in the MGC.

(d) Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) 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. India hosts the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate near Delhi and a BIMSTEC Energy Centre near Bengaluru. India has been organizing events and activities in areas ranging from agriculture, disaster management, space and remote sensing to transnational crimes, trade and investment. India also offers research and higher education scholarships, while promoting common programmes.

(e) The Quad comprising of India, Australia, Japan, and the United States originated as a spontaneous emergency response to the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. The four countries today have a growing convergence of strategic, political and security interests in the Indo Pacific region including shared vision on international law, economic opportunity, peace, stability, and security in all domains including the maritime domain underpin the development and prosperity of the peoples of the Indo-Pacific. The Quad also has a shared commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). The Quad has today acquired momentum and salience, with regular dialogues, tabletop exercises, and workshops.

(f) Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) is a smaller organization with five member states: Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, and France (via Réunion). It focuses on economic and environmental issues but has broadened its scope to include maritime security. India was granted observer status in 2020, signalling an important addition in its engagement with the Western Indian Ocean.

(g) Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle and Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya- Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) are other mechanisms in the Indian Ocean Region that India has joined as Development Partner to boost India's connectivity and economic ties with the countries of South-East Indian Ocean.

3.2 The Committee specifically asked about assessment of the Government regarding the addition to India's strategic heft pursuant to starting of all its initiatives in the Indian Ocean region. In response, the Ministry, inter-alia, stated that in the last decade, India has 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 contributes 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.

3.3 The Committee discussed the concerns expressed by various coastal states regarding the security of fishermen resident in those states who have crossed into the waters of neighbouring countries and subsequently, been arrested, with their boats impounded. Several Members expressed their concerns about the well-being of these fishermen and the need for their rapid and expeditious release along with their boats.

I. INDIAN OCEAN RIM ASSOCIATION (IORA)

3.4 Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) is the largest country grouping in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). It was established in 1997 with an aim to revive the historic pan-Indian Ocean-ness among countries in the region. The vision for IORA originated during a visit by late President Nelson Mandela of South Africa to India in 1995. India is a founding Member State. IORA was formerly known as Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC). The name IORA was adopted in November 2013 in Perth, Australia

during the 13th meeting of Foreign Ministers. The Secretariat of IORA is located in Port Louis, Mauritius.

3.5 It has 23 Member States (Commonwealth of Australia, People's Republic of Bangladesh, Union of Comoros, French Republic, Republic of India, Republic of Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Republic of Kenya, Republic of Madagascar, Malaysia, Republic of Maldives, Republic of Mauritius, Republic of Mozambique, Sultanate of Oman, Republic of Seychelles, Republic of Singapore, Federal Republic of Somalia , Republic of South Africa, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, United Republic of Tanzania, Kingdom of Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Republic of Yemen) and 12 Dialogue Partners (People's Republic of China, Arab Republic of Egypt, Republic of Germany, Republic of Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Republic of Turkey, Saudi Arabia, United Kingdom, United States of America and the EU).

3.6 The objectives of IORA are:

- To promote sustainable growth and balanced development of the region and Member States
- To focus on those areas of economic co-operation which provide maximum opportunities for development, shared interest and mutual benefits; and,
- To promote liberalisation, remove impediments and lower barriers towards a freer and enhanced flow of goods, services, investment, and technology within the Indian Ocean rim.

3.7 Cooperation activities are undertaken under the six Priority Areas and 2 Cross-cutting issues through functional bodies like Working Groups. The 6 priority areas (proposed by India in 2011) are:

- (i) Academic Science and Technology (lead- South Africa and Oman)
- (ii) Disaster Risk Management (Lead- Madagascar)
- (iii) Maritime Safety and Security (Lead – India, Co-Chair- Australia)
- (iv) Trade and Investment Facilitation (Lead-Australia)
- (v) Fisheries Management (Lead- Indonesia) and
- (vi) Tourism and Cultural Exchange (South Africa).

The 2 Cross-cutting issues are (proposed by Australia in 2013): Blue Economy (Lead – India; Co-Chair Indonesia) and Women's Economic Empowerment (Iran).

3.8 There are two main sources of funding for IORA: annual membership fee of USD 24,000 by Member States and voluntary contribution by Member States and Dialogue Partners to IORA Special Fund.

3.9 India was the Chair of IORA during 2011-2013. At the 11th Council of Ministers (COM) Meeting in Bengaluru in November 2011, 6 priority areas were identified on the basis of an Indian proposal. During the 22nd IORA COM meeting held in Dhaka in November 2022, IORA endorsed India's candidature for the position of IORA Vice-Chair for the period 2023-25. India's Vice-Chairship of IORA for the period 2023-25 implies assumption of Chairship of IORA by India from 2025-27, which was endorsed during the 23rd COM in Colombo on 11 October 2023.

3.10 Some of the activities undertaken by India in IORA include:

- Signed an MoU for promoting resilience of new and existing infrastructure to climate and disaster risks within the Indian Ocean Region between the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) with IORA (28 April 2022).
- India is the highest contributor to the IORA Special Fund.
- Shri. Saravanan Murugan (IAS:2002, Bihar Cadre), was seconded as Director to the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Secretariat, Port Louis, Mauritius since December 2019 for a term of 2 (initial) +1 (extended) years.
- Deputed an IT Expert/Advisor from India in the IORA Secretariat in September 2020 towards setting up the eOffice at IORA.
- Strengthened institutional frameworks of IORA by taking lead on discussion pertaining to structuring IORA's engagement with Dialogue Partners (since November 2020).
- Signed an MOU between IORA and the Centre for Science & Technology of the Non-aligned and other Developing Countries (NAM S&T Centre) on Application of Science, Technology & Innovation for Sustainable

Development on 7 November 2019 in Abu Dhabi, UAE (on the sidelines of the 19th COM meeting).

- Promoted IORA's engagements with other regional organisations such as through extension of MoU with International Solar Alliance (October 2018). The MoU has been extended for a further period of two years in 2022 and further extension is under process.
- Signed an MOU between IORA and the Indian Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) to enhance academic cooperation in the region and other international economic and development issues (January 2018).
- Undertaken the responsibility of developing HADR guidelines for IORA. The HADR guidelines were finalized by the Committee of Senior Officials' Meeting in June 2021.
- Led the process of development of an MoU for Promotion of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) that was signed in October 2017.
- Participated actively in IORA Adhoc Working Group for framing selection process and eligibility criteria for IORA Secretary General. Joined the Recruitment and Selection Committee (RSC) for selection of the new SG.
- Led the process of formulation of the IORA's Outlook on Indo-Pacific (IOIP) and actively participated in the High level Strategic Dialogue on IORA, held in June 2023 and committed to formulate a Roadmap on implementation of the IOIP.
- Ambassador K. V. Bhagirath, IFS (Retd.) held the office of SG for two terms of 3 years each (2012-15 & 2015-18).
- Indian Navy conducted a seminar on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing at Goa on 2 November 2022.
- Organised Training on 'Marine Oil Preparedness and Response Course' (IMO Introductory, Level-I & II), as the Lead Coordinating Country for Disaster Risk Management (DRM) priority area of IORA, from 18-29 April 2022 in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, in collaboration with its Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program, for all IORA Member States.
- Conducted online courses on 'Principles of Ocean Remote Sensing and its applications' on 26-30 2021 and on 'Fundamentals of Ocean Data Management' (India) - 23-27 August 2021

- Organised a virtual seminar/workshop on Yoga and Ayurveda for IORA member states on the theme of 'Wellness and Holistic Living in the time of COVID-19 on 25 March, 2021
- Conducted capacity building workshop on UNCLOS 1982 (January 29, 2021)
- Conducted training Course organized by INCOIS on 'Understanding Sea Level' (October 2020) and Fishery Oceanography (November 2020)
- A 26-day course on film making at Film and Television Institute of India, Pune – February 17 – March 13, 2020
- Invited IORA Member States to the 4th Annual Joint HADR Exercise held in August 2019 in Chennai.
- Strengthened Cooperation with IORA Regional Centre for Science and Technology Transfer, Tehran by setting up Coordination Centre for Medicinal Plants in collaboration with CSIR- CIMAP, Lucknow in 2017. CCMP organised a virtual workshop titled "Strengthening the competencies of IORA-RCSTT: Planning, Intervention and Management Session on Utilization of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants in the Indian Ocean Region on 18 July, 2022. Previously, the CCMP has also organised a Training Program on 'Diversity, Documentation, Gene Banking, and Database for Medicinal Plants in Lucknow on 25 November 2018.
- Capacity building for Somalia and Yemen in the area of Fisheries under the IORA's flagship Somalia – Yemen Development Programme II in November 2019 at Kochi.
- Conducted the first Familiarisation Visit for Media Personnel and Journalists from IORA Member States from 12-17 November 2017 in India.
- Initiated restructuring of IORA Chair of Indian Ocean Studies (CIOS) as an institution actively involved in Policy planning and research for IORA. India had revived the CIOS in 2014 and sponsored it together with Mauritius. Prof. V. N. Attri (India) held the office from 2014-2020.
- Organized the First Blue Economy Dialogue: 'Prospects of Blue Economy in the Indian Ocean' (Goa, 17-18 August 2015) and Second Blue Economy Dialogue: 'Economic Potential and Commercialisation Aspects of Blue Economy in the Indian Ocean' (New Delhi, 4-5 November 2016).

- Organized 6th Indian Ocean Dialogue in December 2019, New Delhi after which Delhi Consensus on “Indo Pacific: Re-imagining the India Ocean through expanded Geography” was agreed. Recently, on 15 December 2021, organised the 8th edition of the IOD under the theme 'Post Pandemic Indian Ocean: Leveraging Digital Technologies for Health, Education, Development and Trade in IORA Member States'. Indian Ocean Dialogue was launched as an Indian initiative and is IORA’s premier 1.5 track forum for dialogue between academia and officials on strategic issues of interest and concern facing the Association. India hosted the first Indian Ocean Dialogue in Kochi, Kerala from September 5-7, 2015.
- 2nd IORA Renewable Energy Ministerial and Experts Meetings were hosted by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, Government of India from 2 – 4 October 2018 in Delhi NCR, India where the Delhi Declaration on Renewable Energy to move forward on the path of sustainable development was adopted.
- India has also initiated discussions on establishing legal framework on various IORA priority areas such Disaster Risk Management, Maritime Safety and Security, Fisheries etc.
- India also undertook the task of developing a paper on IORA’s Vision/Outlook on Indo- Pacific. At the last (22nd) IORA COM meeting, the Ministers adopted this document.

3.11 The Committee specifically wanted to know about the Ministry’s assessment of IORA in successfully achieving its objective of promoting sustainable development, economic growth, and prosperity and stability in the region. The Ministry, in a written reply, stated that IORA has been instrumental in fostering economic growth, sustainable development, and enhanced cooperation in various domains in the Indian Ocean Region. IORA's membership has expanded to 23 member states and 12 dialogue partners. The IORA Special Fund was established by the Council of Ministers in its meeting held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, August 2004. The IORA Special Fund serves as a central funding mechanism for projects undertaken by the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Member States. Cooperation activities are undertaken under the six Priority Areas and 2 Cross-cutting issues through functional bodies like Working Groups. The draft of IORA's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (IOIP) was formulated by India and was adopted by Council of

Ministers of IORA Member States in 2022. Several capacity-building initiatives have been spearheaded by member states under the aegis of IORA.

3.12 On being asked about the issue of women empowerment in IORA, the Ministry submitted that the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) has recognized the crucial role of Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) in achieving sustainable development within the region. Since 2013, IORA has actively pursued this goal, understanding that empowering women is not just a standalone priority, but intertwined with all other areas of regional cooperation. This commitment is reflected in IORA's second action plan (2022-2027), which outlines the strategic objective: "Promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, ensuring women's rights, access, and opportunities for participation and leadership in the economy, and eliminating violence and discrimination against women and girls in all its forms. Realizing the full prosperity of the region requires investing in the empowerment of women and girls." To achieve this ambitious goal, IORA member states have collaboratively developed a work plan outlining specific activities and initiatives. This plan serves as a roadmap for advancing WEE across the Indian Ocean region, fostering economic opportunities for women, and ultimately, contributing to a more prosperous and equitable future for all.

3.13 Emphasizing the priority of IORA, the representative of the Ministry of External Affairs during the preliminary briefing on 18 December 2024 stated:

"I would like to assure you and the Committee that India is giving high priority to IORA and the following steps show our seriousness. Firstly, a senior and experienced Indian diplomat, Shri Sanjiv Ranjan is taking over as Secretary General of IORA from 1st of January 2025. We also have an officer seconded to the IORA Secretariat since 2019. This step has been taken with a view to strengthening the institutional structure and governance practises in IORA. Thirdly, India assumed the Vice-Chair of IORA for the term 2023-2025 and will assume the Chair of IORA from October, 2025 till 2027.

India's focus is on strengthening institutional, financial and legal framework of IORA towards realizing the true potential of this grouping and consolidating and streamlining efforts to promote cooperation in

the realms of the six priority areas and two cross-cutting themes of IORA.

India places particular emphasis on maritime safety and security and the blue economy. On both these issues, India is the coordinating country working closely with the Chairs on these two areas, Australia and Indonesia respectively. These are issues of immediate relevance to the Member States of IORA and we expect that undertaking concrete projects in these areas will help in the process of consolidating and revitalizing the organisation.

India has developed policy papers such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief guidelines for IORA. The IORA outlook on the Indo-Pacific which was adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2022. We have hosted the Indian Ocean Dialogue. We have also undertaken capacity-building in areas such as IUU fishing, disaster relief, marine oil spillage preparedness, yoga and ayurveda, UNCLOS, oceanography and related issues.

India is also the largest contributor to the IORA Special Fund. We have contributed a million dollars in 2012 and another million dollars in 2019. We have also taken the lead in guiding the Secretariat towards financial prudence and have supported recent steps including reconciliation of accounts and report by an external audit agency. India's Secretary-General, in our Chairship will help in further improving governance issues."

3.14 About the initiatives by IORA on maritime safety and security and blue economy, the Ministry stated that the IORA Action Plan 2022-27 sets out the strategic goals of the Maritime Safety and Security Priority Area. This involves promoting MSS in the Indian Ocean Region through effective coordination between Member States and relevant international organisations for sharing of expertise and resources, strengthening regional cooperation to address Trans Boundary challenges, and ensure freedom of navigation in accordance with International Law, including UNCLOS, while ensuring collaboration across IORA Working Groups on common areas of interest. The Working Group for Maritime Safety and Security (WGMSS) engages maritime officials and experts across IORAs Member States to promote regional cooperation by facilitating practical coordination amongst stakeholders. The WGMSS develops and implements activities through its Work Plan in line with the strategic goals of the IORA Action Plan 2022-27.

3.15 The Blue Economy (BE) initiative within the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) has emerged as a pivotal force, driving sustainable socio-economic growth among its member nations. Introduced in 2014, it strives to foster balanced development while safeguarding marine resources. Through collaborative efforts, member states have embarked on a journey to harness the vast potential of the blue economy. Since its introduction in IORA in 2014, Member States are committed to make this sector a driver for a balanced socio-economic growth and sustainable development. The objectives of the working group, which serves as a platform for collaboration and networking, range from implementing action plans to fostering dialogue and information exchange.

3.16 The IORA Blue Economy team drives sustainable oceanic growth and resource management. Embracing public-private partnerships and technology transfer, it paves the way for enhanced livelihoods through capacity building. By promoting the protection and conservation of marine resources, informing policy decisions, and promoting public-private partnerships, the WGBE seeks to realize its overarching goal of promoting the development of the blue economy in a manner that is Socially inclusive; Economically inclusive; and environmentally sustainable.

3.17 Further, India assumed the role of the Coordinating Country of both Working Groups of Maritime Safety and Security and Blue Economy in 2023. With co-chairs Australia (for Maritime Safety and Security) and Indonesia (for Blue Economy), India has been contributing to the work plans and capacity building activities of IORA member states.

3.18 The Indian Ocean Dialogue (IOD) is a flagship initiative of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). It is an outcome of the 13th IORA Council of Ministers meeting, held in November 2013 in Perth, Australia. On being asked about the status and achievements of IOD, the Ministry stated that IOD is a Track 1.5 format, encouraging an open and free-flow discussion among IORA Member States and between scholars and experts on strategic matters related to the Indian Ocean Region. The Indian Ocean Dialogue covers wide ranging

topics such as economic cooperation, maritime safety and security, blue economy, human assistance and disaster relief and others.

3.19 The Dialogue was instituted on India's initiative. The first Dialogue was held in Kerala, India in 2014. The following editions were held in Perth, Australia in 2015, Padang, Indonesia in 2016, Abu Dhabi, UAE in 2017, in Durban, South Africa in 2018, in New Delhi, India in 2019 and in the virtual mode in 2021. The last (9th IOD) was held in Zanzibar on 22-23 May 2023.

3.20 When asked about the status of the IORA Outlook on the Indo-Pacific adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2022 and its bearing on the Indian Ocean region, the Ministry stated that considering the increasing awareness of the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific region, IORA is guided by the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, inclusivity, respect for international law, including the UN Charter, the principle of pacific settlement of disputes, political independence, non-interference in internal affairs, non-discrimination, peaceful co-existence and mutual benefit in cooperation among its members and with its partners to build strategic trust through dialogue, transparency, and engagement. The draft of IORA's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (IOIP) was formulated by India and was adopted by Council of Ministers of IORA Member States in 2022. IORA's Outlook to the Indo-Pacific is in line with India's SAGAR approach. IORA's engagement in the Indo-Pacific region is guided by following objectives: Enhance Maritime safety and security in the Indo-Pacific region, and the exercise of freedom of navigation & over-flight, in accordance with International Law, including the Charter of the United Nations and the 1982 UNCLOS; Promote Economic growth and shared prosperity for all through open, transparent, inclusive, rules-based and fair systems that enables balanced and sustainable development; enhanced connectivity to promote inclusive growth; Promote Conservation, sustainable use, and management of marine resources in the Indo-Pacific region etc.

3.21 On the Committee's specific question about the contribution and utilization of the IORA Special Fund, the Ministry stated that there are two main sources of Funding in IORA: annual membership by Member States and voluntary contribution by Member States and Dialogue Partners to IORA

Special Fund. The IORA Special Fund was established by the Council of Ministers in its meeting held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, August 2004. The IORA Special Fund serves as a central funding mechanism for projects undertaken by the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Member States. It empowers these states to apply for financial support for projects aligned with IORA's priority areas and the guiding principles outlined in the organisation's Charter. India is the highest contributor to the IORA Special Fund.

3.22 Elucidating the challenges being faced by IORA, the Ministry stated that as the apex regional body, IORA has the responsibility to play a significant role in making the Indian Ocean a more seamless and cooperative space. Developmental issues, lack of robust connectivity, the burden of opaque and unsustainable debt generated by unviable projects, threats to social fabric posed by extremism and fundamentalism, dangers emanating from terrorism, natural disasters and climate change, all these are the challenges that we face. We see IORA is as a regional body that can respond effectively to the needs and enhance individual and collective capacities of Member-States to tackle contemporary challenges of sustainable and balanced economic growth, development and common maritime domain. IORA provides an effective multilateral platform that facilitates realization of untapped opportunities for prosperity, peace and development of the region. The growing number of IORA Members and of Dialogue Partners testifies to that potential and to IORA as the apex body in the region.

3.23 With its 23 members, 12 dialogue partners and two observers, IORA is the most obvious platform for trade, socio-economic and cultural cooperation. It creates common ground for regional economic cooperation and provides opportunities to develop shared interests. It also encourages close interaction of business, academic institutions, scholars and the peoples of the member states. India is committed to building up IORA in line with its own expanding bilateral ties in the region. We will be supportive in the expansion and further invigoration of its activities, from renewable energy and the blue economy to maritime safety and security, water science and greater institutional and think-tank networking. India will work with IORA Member States to

strengthen the institutional, financial and legal framework of IORA, towards realizing the true potential of this dynamic grouping.

3.24 India undertook the responsibility of developing Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) guidelines for IORA. When asked about the salient features, the Ministry responded that the HADR guidelines have been finalized by the Committee of Senior Officials' Meeting in June 2021 and recommended to IORA Council of Ministers for approval at the 21st Meeting. The IORA Guidelines for HADR aims at developing a speedy, responsive, coordinated and effective HADR strategy for IORA member states and serve the purpose to have a common understanding of HADR Operations.

3.25 The salient features of HADR Guidelines for IORA include:

- The guidelines emphasize the need for a coordinated and collective emergency response among IORA member states to effectively address the increasing number of natural disasters in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- HADR operations are primarily a civilian function, but the guidelines recognize the valuable role military assets can play in supporting these operations, especially in the initial response stages.
- The guidelines outline key principles for HADR operations, including objective, unity of effort, security, restraint, legitimacy, responsiveness, simplicity, flexibility, neutrality, and assumption of existing operational plans.
- The guidelines describe the four stages of disaster management: preparatory, initial response, sustenance/ rehabilitation/ recovery, and stabilization/reconstruction. They also detail the specific actions navies can take in each stage.
- The guidelines highlight factors that contribute to the effectiveness of naval forces in HADR operations, such as timeliness, appropriateness, efficiency, absorptive capacity, coordination, cost, access, and exit strategy.
- The guidelines stress the importance of interoperability among participating nations, which can be achieved through regular interactions, exercises etc.

3.26 India has assumed the Vice-Chair of IORA for the term 2023-25 and will assume the Chair of IORA from October 2025 till 2027. In this regard, the Committee were interested in knowing about the initiatives taken up during India's Vice Chairmanship of IORA as well as the initiatives proposed during its Chairmanship. In a written reply, the Ministry stated that the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) is viewed as 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 for India and the Indian Navy conducts training and exercises to counter IUU fishing and piracy. Assistance to Somalia and Yemen has 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.

3.27 The Ministry also stated that India is committed to seeing IORA foster sustained growth and balanced development through better coordination and mutually beneficial economic cooperation in the Indian Ocean region. India's focus is on capacity building in the SME sector, blue economy, maritime safety and security, and urgent developmental priorities such as water and energy security.

3.28 Further, as the Vice-Chair of IORA for the term 2023-25 and as Chair in 2025-27, India will work on consolidating and streamlining efforts to promote cooperation in the realms of the 6 priority areas and 2 cross-cutting themes of the IORA, with particular emphasis on Maritime Safety and Security, and Blue Economy of which India is the Coordinating Country (lead) working closely with Chairs Australia and Indonesia respectively to organise meetings and rationalizing the Work Plans which will feed into IORA Action Plan.

3.29 India has also formulated the IOIP which has been adopted by IORA Members and has taken up the responsibility of formulating a Roadmap for

its implementation during its Vice Chairship. India has contributed in formulating Guidelines on IUU Fishing and organised seminars on IUU Fishing in September 2024. India has taken several steps for organisational strengthening including sending our Secretary General, secondment of a Director, assisting in upgrading IT systems and financial management, strongly pushing for financial prudence in the procedures, financial contribution even on behalf of Comoros.

3.30 India is committed to building up IORA in line with its own expanding bilateral ties in the region. We will be supportive in the expansion and further invigoration of its activities, from renewable energy and the blue economy to maritime safety and security, water science and greater institutional and think-tank networking.

3.31 When asked about the priority areas after assumption of the Chair of IORA by India in October 2025, the Ministry stated that India sees the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) as fostering cooperation and sustainable development. It contributes to enhancing regional security by addressing maritime safety, piracy, and environmental sustainability. As the apex regional body, IORA has the responsibility to play a significant role in making the Indian Ocean a more seamless and cooperative space. We see IORA is as a regional body that can respond effectively to the needs and enhance individual and collective capacities of Member-States to tackle contemporary challenges of sustainable and balanced economic growth, development and common maritime domain.

3.32 The Committee further enquired whether the Government has drawn up any plan for re-energizing/strengthening the institutional, financial and legal framework of IORA towards realizing the true potential of IORA. The Ministry responded that as the Vice Chair and the upcoming Chair for the term 2025-27, India's focus is on structural and institutional strengthening of the IORA in order to realize its full potential. India will work with other IORA members towards the realisation of this objective. Ambassador K. V. Bhagirath, IFS (Retd.) held the office of SG for two terms of 3 years each (2012-15 & 2015-18). Shri. Saravanan Murugan (IAS:2002, Bihar Cadre), was

seconded as Director to the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Secretariat, Port Louis, Mauritius since December 2019 for a term of 2 (initial) +1 (extended) years. 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 and the Indian Navy conducts training and exercises to counter IUU fishing and piracy. India deputed an IT Expert/Advisor from India in the IORA Secretariat in September 2020 towards setting up the eOffice at IORA.

3.33 Regarding the significance of IORA in furthering India's foreign policy objectives, the Ministry stated that India sees the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) as fostering cooperation and sustainable development. India's objective is to promote greater prosperity in the region and of making the Indian Ocean a free, open and inclusive space, based on the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS) as the Constitution of the Seas. India continues to progress in that regard. India's commitment to the well-being and progress of nations of the Indian Ocean, including as first responder and a net security provider, is based on our Neighbourhood First policy, on the SAGAR outlook, and on our approach to the extended neighbourhood as well. It also draws on our broader vision of an Indo-Pacific that is built on a rules-based international order, rule of law, sustainable and transparent infrastructure investment, freedom of navigation and over-flight, and sincere respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity.

II. THE INDO-PACIFIC OCEANS' INITIATIVE (IPOI)

3.34 India's concept of Indo-Pacific was articulated in Prime Minister's keynote address at Shangri La Dialogue in June 2018. It was a wider implementation of the doctrine of SAGAR announced by PM in 2015 for the Indian Ocean Region and our Act East Policy. It calls for a free, open and inclusive order in the Indo-Pacific, based upon respect for sovereignty and

territorial integrity of all nations, peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue and adherence to international rules and laws.

3.35 India's concept of the Indo-Pacific is inclusive in nature and supports an approach that respects the right to freedom of navigation and overflight for all in the international seas. India's approach to the Indo-Pacific is based on cooperation and collaboration, given the need for shared responses to shared challenges in the region and is premised upon the principle of 'ASEAN-Centrality'. On November 04, 2019, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi launched the Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI) at the 14th East Asia Summit held in Bangkok, Thailand as an open, non-treaty based global initiative that seeks to manage, conserve, sustain, and secure the maritime domain.

3.36 So far, 15 countries are part of the IPOI and are co-leading one of its 7 pillars. India has taken the lead on Maritime Security and DRM pillars of IPOI. India is working with various like-minded countries who have come on-board to lead the IPOI pillars - the United Kingdom on Maritime Security Pillar, Australia on Maritime Ecology pillar, France and Indonesia on Marine Resource pillar, Singapore & Italy on Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation Pillar. Last year Germany came on-board to lead the Capacity Building & Resources Sharing Pillar and the USA announced its co-lead of Trade, Connectivity and Maritime Transport pillar with Japan. In 2024, Thailand has joined IPOI as co-lead of the Maritime Ecology pillar and Bangladesh has decided to co-lead the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) pillar with India. Greece has also become a member of the IPOI.

3.37 Stating the initiatives taken up under IPOI and the outcome, the Ministry stated that so far 13 countries are part of the IPOI and are co-leading one of its 7 pillars. India has taken the lead on Maritime Security and DRM pillars of IPOI. We are also working with various like-minded countries who have come on-board to lead the IPOI pillars - the United Kingdom on Maritime Security Pillar, Australia on Maritime Ecology pillar, France and Indonesia on

Marine Resource pillar, Singapore & Italy on Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation Pillar.

3.38 Last year Germany came on-board to lead the Capacity Building & Resources Sharing Pillar and the USA announced its co-lead of Trade, Connectivity and Maritime Transport pillar with Japan. In 2024, Thailand has joined IPOI as co-lead of the Maritime Ecology pillar and Bangladesh has decided to co-lead the DRRM pillar with India. Greece has also become a member of the IPOI. Progress on IPOI reflects a strengthening bond among nations that share a common desire to sustain the two oceans through practical, project-based cooperation.

3.39 As regards funding, the Ministry informed that Projects under IPOI are funded by the countries concerned.

3.40 On the Committee's query regarding the achievement of the IPOI, particularly on management and conservation of the maritime domain, the Ministry replied that the Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI) is an open, non-treaty based global initiative that seeks to manage, conserve, sustain, and secure the maritime domain. In 2021, Australia announced a grant of AUD 1.5 million to generate ideas in preservation of marine ecology of Indo-Pacific. CSIRO, Australia and INCOIS, India have partnered together to take forward cooperation on this pillar. On EAS platform, India and Australia organised EAS Conference on Combating Marine Pollution & Marine Plastic Debris in February 2022, which was followed by a Hackathon on the same topic by Australia and India in December 2022. Under the Maritime Resource pillar, India has shared a concept note on areas of cooperation for consideration of France and Indonesia. During initial discussions Indonesia has indicated to work on preservation on mangroves in the Indo-Pacific and has also proposed for India to consider co-opting its Archipelagic and Island States Forum initiative under IPOI which focuses on climate change mitigation, blue economy and plastic debris. A joint statement titled 'Horizon 2047: 25th Anniversary of the India-France Strategic Partnership, Towards A Century of India-France Relations' and the India-France Indo-Pacific Roadmap was issued in July 2023 during PM's visit to France. India and France have also

launched Indo-Pacific Parks Partnership to build capacities in the Indo-Pacific region in terms of sustainable management of protected areas.

3.41 Upon noticing that only 13 countries are part of the IPOI, the Committee asked about the reasons for the low level of participation along with the efforts being made by the Ministry to bring the more countries onboard. The Ministry stated that so far 13 countries are part of the IPOI and are co-leading one of its 7 pillars. India has taken the lead on Maritime Security and DRM pillars of IPOI. Other like-minded countries who have come on-board to lead the IPOI pillars include - the United Kingdom on Maritime Security Pillar, Australia on Maritime Ecology pillar, France and Indonesia on Marine Resource pillar, Singapore & Italy on Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation Pillar. Germany has come on-board to lead the Capacity Building & Resources Sharing Pillar and the USA announced its co-lead of Trade, Connectivity and Maritime Transport pillar with Japan. In 2024, Thailand has joined IPOI as co-lead of the Maritime Ecology pillar and Bangladesh has decided to co-lead the DRRM pillar with India. Greece has also become a member of the IPOI. Several countries, such as Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Philippines, have expressed keen interest to join IPOI. Discussions are being held with other countries in this regard, and we are also working with various like-minded countries to come on-board to lead the IPOI pillars. Progress on IPOI reflects a strengthening bond among nations that share a common desire to look towards the sustenance of the two oceans through practical, project-based cooperation.

3.42 India provides capacity building to various countries under our Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC). On being asked about the details of capacity building initiatives spearheaded by India under the aegis of IPOI and the response received the Ministry submitted that in the past three years, India has provided 11500+ ITEC slots including both civil and defence trainings, out of which countries in the neighbourhood have used 6250+ slots. Nepal with close to 70% has best utilization and Seychelles with 27% has the least utilization. Around 1250 defence officials from the Maldives and about 1700 from Sri Lanka have been trained by India. Mauritius receives

over 150 slots every year and India meets 70% of all capacity building needs of Seychelles in the defence sector. This is as part of our contributions towards ensuring prosperity and stability across Indo-Pacific region and is not specifically under IPOI.

3.43 With regard to Government's plan for re-energizing/strengthening the IPOI, the Ministry stated that the Idea of IPOI is being discussed at different bilateral and multilateral fora. Discussions are being held with other countries to familiarise them with IPOI. Greater and sustained regional/global engagement, dialogue and cooperation led by India in partnership with key partners and groupings, as relevant, remains the mainstay of our approach. We are also working with various like-minded countries to come on-board to lead the IPOI pillars.

3.44 Elaborating on the role of IPOI in furthering India's foreign policy objectives, the Ministry stated that IPOI is our flagship initiative in the Indo-Pacific Region which was articulated by PM Shri Narendra Modi at East Asia Summit (EAS) in 2019. It builds on SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) doctrine which was outlined by PM Shri Narendra Modi in 2015 in a speech in Mauritius. The IPOI is meant to further practical cooperation under India's Indo-Pacific concept as an open, non-treaty-based global initiative, drawing on existing regional cooperation architecture and mechanisms. The focus of IPOI is on a collaborative effort to better manage, conserve, sustain and secure the maritime domain. It envisages this cooperation under seven pillars namely Maritime Security; Maritime Ecology; Maritime Resources; Capacity Building and Resource Sharing; Disaster Risk Reduction and Management; Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation; and Trade Connectivity and Maritime Transport. India's policy seeks to balance security concerns, promote cooperation, counter external influences, while fostering economic and strategic partnerships promoting regional cooperation. India is also working with various like-minded countries to come on-board to lead the IPOI pillars.

III. BAY OF BENGAL INITIATIVE FOR MULTI-SECTORAL TECHNICAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION (BIMSTEC)

3.45 The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a grouping of seven Member States lying in the littoral and adjacent areas of the Bay of Bengal: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. India is founder member of BIMSTEC. The organization came into existence on 6 June 1997 through the 'Bangkok Declaration'. Six BIMSTEC Summits have been held so far - 2004 (Bangkok), 2008 (New Delhi), 2014 (Nay Pyi Taw), 2018 (Kathmandu) 2022 (Colombo-virtual) and 2025 (Bangkok). The 6th BIMSTEC Summit is proposed to be held in Bangkok in April 2025. Ambassador Indra Mani Pandey is the current and 4th BIMSTEC Secretary General, since 04 January 2024.

3.46 About India's role and contributions in BIMSTEC, the Ministry stated that India hosted BIMSTEC Outreach Summit and Leaders Retreat during the 8th BRICS Summit in Goa on 15-16 October 2016. India recently hosted the BIMSTEC Aquatics Championship in New Delhi from 07-09 February 2024. India hosted the Second BIMSTEC Foreign Minister's Retreat on 11-12 July 2024 in New Delhi, in person. India hosted the first ever Informal Meeting of BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers on the sidelines of 79th Session of UNGA on 27 September 2024, New York. National Security Advisor participated in 4th BIMSTEC National Security Chiefs' (BNSCs) Meeting held on 24-26 July 2024, Myanmar.

3.47 As a lead in Security pillar, India hosts the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate (BCWC) at Noida to provide weather data for the region. The Host Country Agreement (HCA) for establishment of a BIMSTEC Energy Centre (BEC) was signed between India and BIMSTEC Secretariat in November 2024. India has hosted 3 Disaster Management Exercises in 2017, 2020 and 2021 with BIMSTEC countries. The Second Meeting of the BIMSTEC Expert Group on Cyber Security Cooperation was held in New Delhi, India on 21 January 2025.

3.48 It has been stated that our cooperation under BIMSTEC is a convergence of our 'Neighborhood 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. Explaining the initiatives undertaken under BIMSTEC with regard to the Indian Ocean region and maritime security, the Ministry stated that India accords top-priority to Maritime Security in Indian Ocean Region and understands the critical role of regional cooperation among BIMSTEC member states to further bolster the endeavour to achieve a safe and secure Bay of Bengal. India has hosted three Meetings of the Expert Group on Maritime Security Cooperation in the Bay of Bengal. The draft guidelines for Conduct of MLEAs during Interaction at Sea have been prepared by India and are under discussion among member states. The first ever BIMSTEC Ports Conclave was held at Vishakhapatnam on 7-8 November 2019 with an aim to provide a platform to strengthen maritime interaction, port-led connectivity initiatives and sharing best practices among Member States.

3.49 When asked about the assessment of the initiatives taken under BIMSTEC and its functioning, the Ministry responded that BIMSTEC has made progress in fostering regional cooperation through established institutional framework and streamlined sectors of cooperation. An Eminent Persons' Group was also formed to chart a future roadmap of BIMSTEC that addresses the current challenges and enables the Organisation to realise its immense potential for regional integration, sustainable development and security of the Bay of Bengal region. To help in institutional building of BIMSTEC, India has provided a onetime grant of USD 1 million to the operational budget of the BIMSTEC Secretariat.

3.50 On the Committee's specific query regarding the Government's plan for infusing more resources in BIMSTEC and strengthening of this regional body for greater regional cooperation, the Ministry stated that the provision of budgetary resources as necessary to BIMSTEC is regularly discussed at various levels in BIMSTEC. India as a lead member has provided a one time

grant of USD 1 million to the operational budget of the BIMSTEC Secretariat to complete institution building tasks. India has also arranged number of capacity building/training initiatives in several sectors of cooperation for BIMSTEC member states.

3.51 The Committee also wanted to know about the programmes in the current year for involving the youth and women to play a greater role in BIMSTEC. The Ministry stated that in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, it is organizing BIMSTEC Youth Summit in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, on 07-11 February 2025. MEA is also organising BIMSTEC Young Leaders' Climate Change Summit on 20-24 February 2025 in New Delhi.

3.52 Spelling out the role of BIMSTEC in realizing India's foreign policy objectives, the Ministry stated that for India, BIMSTEC represents the intersection of its 'Neighbourhood First' outlook, the 'Act East Policy' and the 'SAGAR' vision with a specific focus on the Bay of Bengal region. The organisation has been playing a crucial role in improving our cooperation with the other six member states on a large spectrum of issues: enhancing security, trade facilitation, improving people to people contact, establishing connectivity, promoting institutional building, collaboration in health and space, digital public infrastructure, capacity building etc.

IV. QUAD

3.53 The Quad comprising of India, Australia, Japan, and the United States originated as a spontaneous emergency response to the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. From 2008 to 2016, the four Quad partners have focused on securing a free and open Indo-Pacific, taking joint action against terrorism, and promoting a rules-based system. In 2017, the Quad began convening on a bimonthly basis at the Senior Officials-level.

3.54 The Quad has two major meeting formats besides continuous activity across a dozen Working Groups – Quad Leaders' Summit and Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting. In March 2021, the first Quad Leaders' Summit was held in virtual format. The first in-person Leader-level meeting was hosted by

President Biden in Washington DC in September 2021. Since then, four more in-person (2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024) and two virtual Summits (2021, 2022) at the Leaders' level have taken place.

3.55 In 2019, the Quad Foreign Ministers met for the first time on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York City. So far, one virtual and eight in-person Quad Foreign Ministerial meetings have been held from 2019. The most recent Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held on 21 January 2025 in Washington DC. In February 2021, Quad countries appointed Sherpas for overall coordination at the policy level.

3.56 Explaining the manner in which the Quad fits into India's vision of the Indian Ocean region, the Ministry stated that the four countries today have a growing convergence of strategic, political and security interests in the Indo Pacific region including shared vision on international law, economic opportunity, peace, stability, and security in all domains including the maritime domain underpin the development and prosperity of the peoples of the Indo-Pacific. The Quad also has a shared commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). The Quad has today acquired momentum and salience, with regular dialogues, tabletop exercises, and workshops.

3.57 India's vision and approach to the Indo-Pacific region was articulated by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi at the Shangri La Dialogue in Singapore in 2018. India stands for an open, balanced, rules-based and stable international trade regime in the Indo-Pacific. Our approach is based on cooperation and collaboration, given the need for shared responses to shared challenges. This was elaborated through the vision of SAGAR, which stands for Security and Growth for all in the Region. SAGAR also guides our approach towards both the Indo-Pacific region and issues related to the maritime domain in the Quad context. India's vision for the Indian Ocean region is rooted in advancing cooperation in our region; and, to use our capabilities for the benefit of all in our common maritime home. The vision is captured in the five principles outlined by PM Shri Narendra Modi. It includes:

- India will do everything to safeguard its mainland and islands and defend its interests.

- India will deepen economic and security cooperation with our maritime neighbours and island states.
- Collective action and cooperation will best advance peace and security in the maritime region of India as well as prepare us better to respond to emergencies
- India seeks a more integrated and cooperative future in the region that enhances the prospects for sustainable development for all; and
- All countries in the IOR have the primary responsibility for peace, stability and prosperity in the Indian Ocean.

3.58 To implement the vision of SAGAR, the Indo-Pacific Oceans’ Initiative (IPOI) was launched in 2019 with ASEAN and ASEAN-led mechanisms as the primary platforms and the East Asia Summit as a premier leaders-led forum. ASEAN holds a central position in the vision of Quad. The positive agenda of Quad complements the various mechanisms of ASEAN. The centrality of ASEAN and ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) also contributes to the vision of Quad for the region. The Quad’s priorities pertaining to strengthening regional maritime, economic, and technology security in the face of increasing threats, as well as promoting reliable and resilient supply chains are in line with India’s vision of the Indian Ocean Region.

3.59 Further, the Quad has a constructive agenda aimed at complementing the IPOI’s development priorities – accelerating the implementation of the SDGs and delivering public goods, with a strong focus on enabling peace, prosperity, and stability. The Quad seeks to address the priorities of countries through practical projects and capacity building initiatives. Quad cooperation is also strongly anchored in the shared values and commitment to the principles of democracy, international law, and rules based international order as also a vision for a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific.

3.60 The Quad’s agenda covering areas such as health security, climate change, critical and emerging technologies, infrastructure and connectivity, HADR, maritime security, and counter-terrorism only furthers the IPOI’s objective to promote collaboration with like-minded countries in the areas of maritime ecology; maritime security; maritime resources; capacity building

and resource sharing; disaster risk reduction and management; science, technology, and academic cooperation; trade, connectivity, and maritime transport.

3.61 The Committee asked whether the Quad has any role in the overall security architecture of the IOR and in countering Chinese influence in the region. The Ministry responded that India's commitment to the well-being and progress of nations of the Indian Ocean is based on our Neighbourhood First policy, the SAGAR outlook, our approach to the extended neighbourhood and to a free and open Indo-Pacific that we champion under Quad. India as the first responder and a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region will continue its approach of contributing to build capacity and secure safety and security in the Indian Ocean Region. A multilateral rules-based international order along with respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity remains the foundation for India's action in the IOR. As the Indian Ocean increases in importance in the 21st century, India and the regional stakeholders have to collectively ensure its security and prosperity.

3.62 As political democracies, pluralistic societies and market economies, Quad countries are committed to global good and to upholding a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region including the IOR. Quad collaboration is aimed at ensuring that the Indo-Pacific remains free, open, stable and prosperous. Quad countries are invested in trusted partnership with each other and is against spheres of influence. Quad collaborates in a contemporary and mutually beneficial mode. The Quad supports the democratizing of the global space and collaborative approaches and is against others having a veto on our choices.

3.63 The Quad is of the view that international law, including respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the maintenance of peace, safety, security and stability in the maritime domain underpin the development and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific. The Quad continues to emphasize the importance of adherence to international law, particularly as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), to address challenges to the global maritime rules-based order, including with respect to

maritime claims, and in the South and East China Seas. We are seriously concerned about the situation in the East and South China Seas and reiterate our strong opposition to any unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo by force or coercion. We continue to express our serious concern about the militarization of disputed features, and coercive and intimidating manoeuvres in the South China Sea. We emphasize the importance of maintaining and upholding freedom of navigation and overflight, other lawful uses of sea, and unimpeded commerce consistent with international law.

3.64 In order to enhance the Quad's collaboration and coordination with regional partners, the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) was launched in 2022 as a technology and training initiative to enhance maritime domain awareness in the Indo-Pacific region. IPMDA harnesses innovative technology to provide partners across Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean region and the Pacific with near real-time information to rapidly detect and respond to a wide range of challenges involving illicit maritime activities such as illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, climate events, and humanitarian crises. Since then, the IPMDA initiative has been scaled to cover the Indian Ocean Region, through the integration of the Information Fusion Center—Indian Ocean Region, Gurugram in 2024. Quad countries also contribute to the region through capacity building cooperation for enhancing maritime security.

3.65 As regards the achievements of the Quad in addressing maritime security and safety, HADR, environment protection, connectivity, strategic technologies, supply chain resilience, health, education and cyber security, etc. in the IOR, the Ministry stated that the Quad is supporting the Indo-Pacific region through practical cooperation in areas such as maritime security, critical and emerging technologies, cyber security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, health security, climate change, counter-terrorism, infrastructure and connectivity, and addressing the debt crisis through sustainable, transparent and fair lending and financing practices. The Quad also has ongoing initiatives that are aimed at popularizing STEM

education through fellowships and organizing capacity building workshops in disaster resilient infrastructure.

3.66 Under the Quad Maritime Security Working group, the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) initiative was announced at the 2022, to provide near-real-time, integrated, and cost-effective maritime domain data to maritime agencies in the region, supporting regional capacity in combating a wide range of illicit maritime activities, including illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and responding to climate-related and humanitarian events, covering three major sub-regions in the Indo-Pacific maritime space- the Pacific Islands, Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean Region. MAITRI (Maritime Training Institute – containerized and mobile training infrastructure for easy deployment to multiple locations of interest) is an India-led initiative announced during the 2024 Quad Summit to enable partner countries in the Indo Pacific region to maximize tools provided through IPMDA and other Quad partner initiatives, to monitor and secure their waters, enforce their laws, and deter unlawful behavior. India will host the inaugural MAITRI workshop in 2025.

3.67 The Quad Partnership on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) was announced by Quad Leaders in Tokyo on 24 May 2022, as part of a shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific that is inclusive and resilient. Quad Foreign Ministers signed into operation the Guidelines for the ‘Quad Partnership on HADR in the Indo-Pacific’ in September 2022. Subsequently, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to coordinate Quad HADR responses to disasters in the region have been annexed to these Guidelines. Quad partners coordinated their response to the PNG Enga Landslide (May 2024), Typhoon Yagi (September 2024) and Vanuatu earthquake (December 2024).

3.68 As part of the Quad Climate Working Group, initiatives are being undertaken to support Indo-Pacific countries with energy transition, promoting sustainable consumption and production, disaster risk resilience, climate information exchange, green shipping, and capacity building. Under the clean energy pillar of this Working Group, India led projects in

collaboration with the ISA to funding solar projects (solar cold storage, solar rooftop for healthcare facilities, and solar water pumping systems) in select Indo-Pacific countries (Comoros, Madagascar, Seychelles and Fiji) are underway.

3.69 Through the Quad Infrastructure Coordination Group, Quad partners regularly share assessments of regional infrastructure needs and coordinate their technical assistance and capacity-building efforts to deliver transparent, demand-driven, quality, sustainable, and climate-resilient infrastructure. The Quad Infrastructure Fellowships Program aims to empower more than 1,800 of the region's infrastructure practitioners to design, build and manage quality infrastructure in their home countries during the period 2024-2027. The Quad Ports of the Future Partnership was announced in 2024 to coordinate, exchange information & best practices, and mobilize government & private sector investments in quality port infrastructure across the Indo-Pacific region. In 2025, India will host a Quad Regional Ports and Transportation Conference, in Mumbai.

3.70 Under the Quad Critical and Emerging Technologies Working Group, Quad partners are working together to strengthen the supply chain resilience and improve digital connectivity in the Indo-Pacific region through access to critical and emerging technologies and advanced telecommunications technology, including 5G networks and Open RAN. To advance the development of a trusted, secure and robust telecommunications network, and promote supplier diversification, Quad countries are pursuing Open RAN deployment in Palau. Under the Advancing Innovation to Empower NextGen Agriculture (AI-ENGAGE) initiative, Quad science agencies are identifying joint funding opportunities to encourage collaborative research to leverage joint funding, expertise, infrastructure and other resources to deliver scientific advances to increase crop yield and resilience.

3.71 As part of the Quad Health Security Partnership, the Quad delivered more than 400 million safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine doses to Indo-Pacific countries and almost 800 million doses globally, bilaterally and in partnership with COVAX. Announced at the 2024 Quad Leaders' Summit, the

Quad Cancer Moonshot initiative aims to leverage public and private resources to combat cancer in the Indo-Pacific region, with an initial focus on cervical cancer. India has committed to offer \$7.5 million worth HPV sampling kits, detection kits and cervical cancer vaccines to Indo-Pacific countries.

3.72 In order to deepen educational and people-to-people ties and build a talented pool of next-generation STEM minds to lead Quad countries in cutting-edge research and innovation, two cohorts of students from the Quad countries and South East Asian countries (in case of the second cohort) have been allotted the Quad STEM Fellowship during the years 2023 and 2024. During the 2024 Summit, India announced a new initiative to award fifty Quad scholarships, worth \$500,000, to students from the Indo-Pacific to pursue a 4-year undergraduate engineering program at a Government of India-funded technical institution. The scholarships are expected to be launched during the academic year 2025-26.

3.73 The Quad Senior Cyber Group focuses on a range of initiatives, from the adoption of shared cyber security standards and secure software development to capacity building and cultivation of a skilled workforce. Two editions of the Quad Cyber Challenge have been held in 2023 and 2024 in the Quad countries, to strengthen individuals' and communities' cyber security awareness and action. India has proposed to host a Quad Cyber Bootcamp in 2025 to share best practices in protecting their Critical Infrastructure, with the participation of around 20 nations from the Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region.

3.74 The Quad Space Working Group is fostering Quad's commitment to leveraging space capabilities – applications and technologies, for the benefit of the Indo-Pacific while ensuring responsible and collaborative practices in space activities. Capacity building workshops were organized in Feb-Mar 2023 for Indo-Pacific countries for monitoring and responding to extreme precipitation events by utilizing the Earth observation satellite technology. Under India's lead, a cloud-enabled web-based platform (based on archival satellite data) for interactive computing & visualization, and capacity

development related to extreme weather events has been developed by ISRO for Mauritius.

3.75 On being asked about the working and achievements of the Quad Maritime Security Working Group in the Indian Ocean region, the Ministry informed that the Quad Maritime Security Working Group is aimed at strengthening capacity and capability of the Indo-Pacific partners to respond to contemporary maritime security challenges and enhance information-sharing among Quad partners. Quad countries have been exchanging unclassified information on counter-narcotic operations and IUU fishing. The Quad is also looking at coordinating capacity building and technical assistance to the region.

3.76 Through the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA), announced at the 2022 Leaders' Summit, Quad is providing near-real-time, integrated, and cost-effective maritime domain data to maritime agencies in the region, supporting regional capacity in combating a wide range of illicit maritime activities, including illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and responding to climate-related and humanitarian events. IPMDA will cover three major sub-regions in the Indo-Pacific maritime space- the Pacific Islands, Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean Region. IPMDA has been rolled out in the Pacific (Australian-led) and Southeast Asia (US-led). The operationalization of IPMDA in the Indian Ocean Region, through IFC-IOR, Gurugram, was announced in 2024. Quad partners intend to layer new technology and data into IPMDA in 2024-25, to continue to deliver cutting edge capability and information to the region.

3.77 During the 2024 Summit, an India-led initiative, namely regional Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific (MAITRI), was announced to enable partner countries in the Indo Pacific region to maximize tools provided through IPMDA and other Quad partner initiatives, to monitor and secure their waters, enforce their laws, and deter unlawful behavior. India will host the inaugural MAITRI workshop in 2025. The following initiatives were also announced during the same Summit and are under discussion by the Working Group: Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission to improve Coast Guard

interoperability and to advance maritime safety; Quad Indo-Pacific Logistics Network pilot project, to pursue shared airlift capacity among the four nations to support civilian response to natural disasters; and Quad Maritime Legal Dialogue to support efforts to uphold the rules-based maritime order in the Indo-Pacific.

3.78 On the question of importance of Quad in India's foreign policy, the Ministry stated that Quad is amongst our foremost foreign policy priorities. India's membership in Quad contributes towards furthering our foreign policy objectives including Vision SAGAR and IPOI. As a leading voice of the developing world and Global South countries, India in turn adds value, relevance and credibility to the Quad by its participation.

3.79 The Quad is a force for global good and India is working with the other Quad partners in the Indo-Pacific region on initiatives which contribute to delivering quality and resilient infrastructure; building a resilient and secure cyber security environment; harnessing emerging technologies for the benefit of people across the Indo-Pacific, and deploying these technologies to facilitate economic prosperity, openness, and connectivity; and bolstering maritime security & improving maritime domain awareness.

3.80 Quad has also enabled the four partners to explore plurilateral convergences beyond the strengths of their individual bilateral relationships. India remains open to intensifying the ongoing collaboration and expanding the agenda to include new domains. India in collaboration with the Quad partners is contributing to shaping a stable global order.

3.81 Elaborating on the significance of Quad in India's foreign policy, the representative of the Ministry of External Affairs during the oral evidence on 17 June 2025 submitted as under:

“Quad actually was a spontaneous grouping that was created after the 2004 tsunami. It has since then developed much, much better to include a number of other activities. In fact, its upgradation to the summit level since 2004 has conveyed a key message to the rest of the region. Today, Quad addresses maritime security, safety, HADR, environment protection, connectivity, strategic technologies, a more

recent development, supply chain resilience, and of course, at our instance, health, education, and also cyber security, among others. Like you noted, Sir, the inclination of the other three partners to try and focus on security is somewhat tempered by the fact that we are the more reluctant partner when it comes to getting Quad to focus on security matters. The Chinese have never lost an opportunity to make the point that the Quad is essentially an Asian NATO, which will bring war to the Indo-Pacific, and that countries in the Indo-Pacific, especially in Southeast Asia, should be wary of anything to do with Quad, and that this is all warmongering and so on. Our own approach is also cautious because of our multi-alignment in the way we approach our foreign policy. It is one of the reasons why we are not able to enter into Defence partnerships the way Pakistan or someone else is able to commit to Military or Defence partnerships.”

V. INDIAN OCEAN NAVAL SYMPOSIUM (IONS)

3.82 Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) was established in 2008 by the Indian Navy to strengthen maritime security and promote collaborative efforts among Navies of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region to address common challenges in the Indian Ocean Region. There are 25 member nations - Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Iran, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, France, Kenya, Mauritius, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, Timor Leste and UK. There are 9 observer nations (China, Germany, Italy, Japan, Madagascar, Netherlands, Russian, Spain and Republic of Korea). IONS have established 3 working groups to focus on key areas: Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), Maritime Security and Information Sharing & Interoperability. India has played a significant role in IONS both as a founding member and as a leader shaping the direction and the priorities of the symposium. India was the maiden chair of IONS for the period 2008-10. India currently co-chairs the HADR and Maritime security working groups alongside Iran.

3.83 The Committee were keen to know about the initiatives taken under the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium and the outcome of such initiatives. The inaugural edition of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) was held in

February 2008 at New Delhi, with Indian Navy as the Chair (2008 – 2010). India is scheduled to take over as the Chair of IONS (2025-27) during the 9th IONS Conclave of Chiefs planned to be conducted in India in late 2025. India has played a key role in enhancing Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) within IONS. India established the Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), a hub for real-time information sharing among member nations to monitor maritime activities. India has signed White Shipping Information Exchange Agreements with several IONS countries towards enhancing regional maritime security and improving member states' responses to potential threats.

3.84 India has been providing disaster relief and humanitarian assistance in response to natural disasters across the IOR. India also provided medical aid to IOR countries during COVID-19 pandemic. India helped in the evacuation of Indian and foreign nationals during Operation Rahat in 2015. During Cyclone Idai (2019), India provided relief material and medical assistance to Mozambique, in cooperation with other IONS countries. India has not only responded to disasters in Friendly Foreign Countries in IOR, but also facilitated HADR workshops and coordinated disaster response exercises under the IONS framework, improving the region's collective capacity in response to emergencies.

3.85 India's active role in leading IONS initiatives has improved coordination between regional navies, which has directly contributed to the reduction in piracy and maritime terrorism in the Indian Ocean. The joint exercises at sea hosted by India under IONS such as IONS Maritime Exercise (IMEX) focusing on HADR, Search and Rescue and Maritime Security have strengthened interoperability among IONS member states, allowing regional navies to operate cohesively in a variety of maritime security challenges.

3.86 Emphasizing the role of IONS beyond a talking shop, the representatives of the Ministry of Defence during oral evidence on 17 June 2025 stated:

“There are three working groups that work in the IONS. It is not simply a talking shop, but it is an inclusive organization of 34 navies, 25

member navies, and 9 observer navies. So, many times, through the three working groups that we got, one on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief; the second one on maritime security; and the 3rd one on information sharing, so depending on the country that holds the Chair, we have a whole host of activities that are conducted under these three working groups which is inclusive. So, they have members that are changing.

A lot of work has been done, the aim being to evolve common SOPs so that we have interoperability; we have a common understanding of what the threats are; we have a common approach to how we can address those threats; and we work together and build mutual trust and confidence. This time, we are getting back the Chair in November of 2025, and we hope to hold it for two years. Then, with the guidance of the MoD and MEA, we hope to try to see whether we can intensify those activities and take those activities even further. We do not want it to be a talking shop. It is a collaborative organization and we want it to deliver.”

CHAPTER 4

CULTURAL AND DIASPORA LINKS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION

India and the countries of Indian Ocean Region (IOR) share age old historical, religious, trade and cultural links. As a result, Indian diaspora is present in all the countries of the Indian Ocean Region, especially in the Gulf region (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait etc.) and in Africa (South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Mauritius etc).

4.2 The size of the Indian Diaspora in the IOR, country-wise as enumerated by Indian Mission/Posts, as on 01 January 2025 is given below:

No	Littoral State(s)	PIOs	NRIs	Total Indian Overseas in Littoral States
1	Australia	6,26,000	3,50,000	9,76,000
2	Bahrain	4,506	3,42,350	3,46,856
3	Bangladesh	10	7,000	7,010
4	Comoros	200	20	220
5	Djibouti	8	1,000	1,008
6	Egypt	366	5,134	5,500
7	Eritrea	0	140	140
8	Indonesia	1,20,000	14,817	1,34,817
9	India	-	-	-
10	Iran	445	10,320	10,765
11	Iraq	0	17,100	17,100
12	Kenya	60,000	20,000	80,000
13	Kuwait	2,356	10,07,961	10,10,317
14	Madagascar	15,000	2,500	17,500
15	Malaysia	27,50,000	1,85,000	29,35,000
16	Maldives	140	30,000	30,140
17	Mauritius	8,71,140	26,357	8,97,497
18	Mozambique	22,000	3,000	25,000
19	Myanmar	23	354	377
20	Oman	1,754	6,60,299	6,62,053
21	Pakistan	0	0	0
22	Qatar	Data not available	8,30,491	8,30,491
23	Réunion (France)	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available

24	SaudiArabia	0	26,45,302	26,45,302
25	Seychelles	5,093	8,245	13,338
26	Singapore	1,07,180	3,50,000	4,57,180
27	SouthAfrica	13,18,431	74,057	13,92,488
28	SriLanka	16,00,000	7,500	16,07,500
29	Sudan	55	85	140
30	Tanzania	40,000	15,000	55,000
31	Thailand	1,35,179	30,236	1,65,415
32	Timor-Leste	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available
33	United Arab Emirates	6,614	38,90,953	38,97,567
34	Somalia	0	100	100
35	Yemen	420	700	1,120
		76,86,920	1,05,36,021	1,82,22,941
Total Overseas Indians: 3,42,57,544				
Total Overseas Indians in the Littoral States IOR:1,82,22,941				
Percentage of Indians in Littoral States in the IOR out of total Indian				
Diaspora in the world: 53.19%				

4.3 When asked about the cultural and diaspora links shared by India with the countries of the IOR along with the details in respect of migration and cultural exchanges, the Ministry stated that India and the countries of Indian Ocean Region share historical links including religious, trade and cultural. The Indian diaspora present in this region continue to be deeply connected with their Indian roots especially through religious and cultural traditions and languages. They celebrate Indian festivals with great fervour. Some examples of cultural exchanges include: streets being named after Indian personalities e.g. a street in the city centre of Antananarivo, in Madagascar, is named after Mahatma Gandhi; several socio-cultural organisations in the countries promote Indian culture e.g. Mauritius has more than 100; Mauritius also hosts the World Hindi Secretariat mandated to promote Hindi globally; regular exchanges of cultural troupes takes places e.g. several countries of the region participated in the Surajkund International Craft Mela and ICCR troupes regularly visit the countries to showcase Indian culture.

4.4 Given that India share cultural and Diaspora links with countries of the IOR, the Committee wanted to know about the efforts made for promoting cultural diplomacy through deepening of people-to-people ties. In a written submission, the Ministry stated *inter-alia* the Government of India has been taking steps to strengthen these ties by way of establishing Cultural Centers, sponsoring visits of performing art groups, organizing/supporting conferences/seminars, running Chairs of Indian Studies, offering scholarships to students to study in India, supporting visits of eminent academicians/dignitaries to India, promotion of Hindi and other Indian languages, sending busts/statues and visual art exhibitions, conferring awards to distinguished alumni, organizing International Day of Yoga, organizing festivals. India Week, conducting workshops and seminars in various fields including Yoga & Ayurveda etc.

4.5 On being asked about the role of Indian diaspora in fostering deeper links with countries in the IOR for furthering India's foreign policy objectives, the Ministry stated that the Indian diaspora plays a strategic role in strengthening India's ties across the world, including with the countries of the Indian Ocean Region. Mindful of the incredibly diverse nature of the Indian Diaspora, spanning across various countries, cultures, and socio-economic backgrounds, the Ministry has formulated a robust and multifaceted Diaspora engagement policy framework characterized under the rubric of 4Cs - Care, Connect, Celebrate & Contribute. This framework has proven to be successful in not only ensuring the welfare of the Indian Diaspora, but also in harnessing their potential to support India's economic, strategic and foreign policy objectives.

4.6 Initiatives such as the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD), which celebrates the contributions of the Indian Diaspora and encourages them to explore the rich cultural heritage of India, provides a platform to leverage the diaspora's expertise in technology, education, innovation, to attract investments and entrepreneurship, and promote India's global soft power. Regional Pravasi Bhartiya Divas (RPBD) were organised in IOR countries with large Indian Diaspora, such as Singapore, Mauritius, Australia and South Africa, to

provide another platform for direct interaction and engagement with Diaspora. The Know India Programme (KIP) gives an opportunity to the Indian Diaspora youth to connect with their ancestral homeland and update their knowledge about India. Promotion of Cultural Ties with Diaspora (PCTD) scheme aims to strengthen the cultural soft power of India, while Scholarship Programme for Diaspora Children (SPDC) promotes India as an education hub. Besides these programs, Indian Missions/ Posts abroad play a crucial role in understanding the needs of the diaspora. They interact regularly with community leaders, organizations, and individuals to gather information on their concerns, challenges, and aspirations. The success of these programs has enabled to leverage the large Indian Diaspora as a strategic asset to enhance India's regional influence, particularly in the neighbourhood and a multipolar Indo-Pacific. The Ministry remains steadfast in its endeavor of strategically mobilizing the Indian diaspora to contribute towards India's growth.

4.7 When asked whether the large presence of Indian diaspora in the IOR has been factored in India's Indian Ocean Strategy, the Ministry stated that the Government of India, is actively engaged in harnessing the potential of Indian Diaspora across the globe for the development of India. Because of their political, economic, social and cultural importance, the Indian Diaspora can be leveraged as a strategic asset to realize foreign policy goals. They contribute to India's soft power projection, provide diplomatic leverage, act as an economic bridge through investments, remittances, and entrepreneurial ventures and they can also be a channel for political advocacy. In recent years, they have played an important role during disasters and crisis response. Diaspora networks mobilize swift aid and support during emergencies like the Covid pandemic and natural disasters. Therefore, the Government of India, through its Diaspora engagement programmes and schemes, endeavours to leverage the strength of the Indian Diaspora for furthering India's foreign policy objectives.

4.8 Given the crucial role played by Indian Missions/Posts abroad in connecting with the diaspora community, the Ministry was also asked the

manner in which such Missions/Posts abroad can play a greater role in promotion of India's global soft power through its Diaspora in the IOR. In a written submission, the Ministry stated that Missions/Posts abroad play an important role in promotion of India's global soft power through engaging with the Diaspora. Besides being a 'Home away from Home' for the Diaspora and assisting them when needed, Indian Missions/Posts are crucial in executing the various welfare schemes and engagement programmes for the Indian Diaspora abroad. These programmes are part of the comprehensive framework to engage with the Diaspora devised by the Government of India, in view of the growing importance of the Indian diaspora in shaping our foreign policy and international image. Indian Missions and Posts are thus the channels through which the government connects with the Indian diaspora to celebrate our shared heritage and to promote India's global soft power.

PART- II
OBSERVATIONS/ RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

1. India's Strategic Responsibility in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)

The Committee acknowledge the paramount strategic, economic, and environmental significance of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) for India. With a coastline of over 11098 kilometres, coupled with its vast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 2.4 million square kilometres, India is uniquely positioned at the heart of one of the most vital regions in the world. Nearly 90% of India's trade by volume, including oil imports, transits through the Indian Ocean which also handles half of the world's container shipments. Thus, the Indian Ocean is not only critical for India's economic stability but also serves as a bridge for global trade between Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

Given this geo-strategic importance, the Committee are of the considered view that India's leadership role in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is both a natural and necessary extension of its geopolitical and economic interests and thereby, it should take a leading role in ensuring the security, stability, and prosperity of the region. The Committee observe that India's leadership in the Indian Ocean is underscored by its strategic framework, Vision SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and its evolved version, Vision MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions for the Global South). These guiding principles accentuate India's commitment to a rules-based order, respect for sovereignty, freedom of navigation, and the protection of regional maritime security. The Indian Ocean is undeniably an integral part of India's global strategy, and it is in India's best interest to assert its role as a guardian of this vital maritime space. The Committee urge that the MEA should intensify its efforts to build stronger bilateral, multilateral engagements and defence partnerships while ensuring the region's sustainability and security. By fostering a cooperative, rules-based order in the Indian Ocean, India should

continue enhancing its role as a leading regional power, securing the region for itself and the global community, while affirming that the Indian Ocean remains *India's Ocean*.

(Recommendation No. 1)

2. Strengthening India's Role as a net security Provider in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)

The Committee are cognizant of the significant geopolitical and security challenges faced by IOR that jeopardize its stability. The growing presence of extra-regional actors, particularly China, through strategic infrastructure investments and dual-use projects, poses a serious challenge to India's security interests. The increasing militarization of ports, alongside activities such as illegal fishing, piracy, and the rise of terrorism, further complicate the situation. Additionally, issues like climate change, marine pollution, and the destruction of marine biodiversity threaten the ecological balance of the region and, in turn, regional food security and disaster resilience.

In light of these challenges, the Committee recommend that India should adopt a multifaceted and comprehensive approach to securing and stabilizing the Indian Ocean. As the largest and most influential nation in the Indian Ocean Region, India is uniquely positioned to act as the net security provider. While underscoring the importance of India's proactive stance in promoting regional stability, ensuring maritime security, and safeguarding the interests of IOR nations, the Committee suggest that India must devote the necessary resources for a greater naval presence in the region and continue to work collaboratively with regional partners, extending capacity-building support, maritime domain awareness, and defense cooperation, particularly with countries that face infrastructural and financial constraints.

(Recommendation No. 2)

3. Comprehensive Strategic Engagement Plan for Strengthening India's Partnerships with Littoral States of the Indian Ocean Region

Recognizing the geopolitical and strategic significance of the Indian Ocean Region, the Committee note that India has maintained diplomatic relationship with all the Indian Ocean littoral states except Comoros, Somalia and Yemen. India has also fostered strong bilateral partnerships with littoral states in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) to enhance regional security, economic cooperation, and strategic influence. India's relationship with countries in the IOR rests on the core pillars of developmental assistance, capacity building programmes, Humanitarian Assistance Disaster Relief (HADR) support and defence and maritime security cooperation.

The Committee recommend that India should frame a comprehensive and dynamic strategic engagement plan for all 35 littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), grounded in shared common interests. This strategy should be flexible and tailored to the specific needs, priorities, and challenges of each country or sub-region, recognizing the diverse geopolitical, economic, and cultural landscapes across the IOR. With island nations like the Maldives and Seychelles, India should focus on enhancing maritime security, capacity building, and climate resilience, while also offering infrastructure development assistance. For South Asian partners like Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, the emphasis should be on strengthening defence cooperation, countering extremism, and promoting trade and investment ties. In Eastern Africa, especially in the Horn of Africa, India should prioritize anti-piracy measures, counter-terrorism initiatives, and maritime security cooperation. Furthermore, India's relationship with Australia should focus on deepening joint naval exercises, intelligence sharing, and addressing shared maritime challenges. By crafting this sub-region and country-specific approach, India should seek to enhance its strategic influence, foster trust, and contribute to a stable, secure, and prosperous

Indian Ocean region, while securing its own national interests in the process.

(Recommendation No. 3)

4. Need for addressing the ambiguities in SAGAR and MAHASAGAR Approaches in India's Indian Ocean Strategy

The Committee note that India's strategy for the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is anchored in two complementary frameworks: SAGAR (Security and Growth for All) and MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions). Introduced in 2015, the SAGAR vision is primarily focused on safeguarding India's interests in the IOR, with an emphasis on combating terrorism, piracy, trafficking, and other illicit activities. In contrast, MAHASAGAR pursues a broader agenda encompassing mutual security, economic growth, and sustainable development, extending India's engagement beyond the IOR to the entire Global South, including Africa. At present, however, there appears to be considerable overlap between the objectives of SAGAR and MAHASAGAR, which could lead to confusion regarding their distinct and collective goals. In the Committee's view, a clear and unified vision will provide further strategic coherence and effectiveness to these initiatives.

Considering the region's vital role in securing trade routes, energy flows, and regional stability, the Committee are satisfied to see India's heightened focus on the IOR. Nevertheless, the Committee observe that India's approach to the region currently seems fragmented, with various initiatives spread across different policy frameworks. To ensure greater alignment, precision of objectives, and a more coherent strategy, the Committee recommend that the Ministry of External Affairs should undertake a comprehensive review of both these frameworks and inform the Committee about the outcome of its assessment within three months.

5. Integrating India's Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific Strategies

The Committee observe that India's approach to the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the Indo-Pacific is intricately interconnected, as articulated in the Ministry's testimony. Both regions are confronted with shared challenges, particularly in maritime security, and necessitate cooperative responses to ensure peace, stability, and sustained growth. The Committee note India's recognition of the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific as a contiguous strategic space, where security and prosperity in one region directly influence the other.

However, while India's Indo-Pacific Policy, as articulated in Prime Minister Modi's keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018, offers a broad framework for engagement, the Committee believe that there is a pressing need for a more integrated and coherent strategy that consolidates India's Indian Ocean Policy with its broader Indo-Pacific approach. The Committee therefore, recommend that the Ministry of External Affairs should develop a cohesive strategic framework that seamlessly aligns India's Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific policies into a unified regional strategy. In the face of increasing Chinese influence and presence in both the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific, the Committee also emphasize that India's strategy should not only focus on addressing shared threats but also act as a balancing force to counteract destabilizing actions. Multilateral platforms such as the Quad, IORA, and ASEAN should also be leveraged for fostering collaborative security and development initiatives.

(Recommendation No 5)

6. Establishment of an Inter-Ministerial Task Force

The Committee has observed that, despite the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) for India's national security, economic growth, and geopolitical interests, there remains an

absence of a dedicated inter-ministerial mechanism to effectively coordinate and streamline the various facets of India's Indian Ocean Strategy. Given the multifaceted nature of the strategy, which encompasses defence, trade, maritime security, diplomacy, environmental sustainability, and development assistance, the Committee strongly recommend the creation of a comprehensive Inter-Ministerial Task Force, involving key ministries, such as External Affairs, Ministry of Defence, Commerce, Environment, Shipping, Finance, Home Affairs, among others. The Committee believe that the establishment of such a task force is imperative for addressing the existing gaps in coordination between Ministries and agencies, ensuring the effective allocation and utilization of resources, and facilitating the rapid and efficient execution of India's strategic priorities in the Indian Ocean.

(Recommendation No 6)

7. Tackling Environmental and Economic Challenges through Regional Cooperation

The Indian Ocean is not just a vital geopolitical space but also an ecologically significant and economically prosperous region. The region's abundant marine resources, including its extensive Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), present tremendous opportunities for collaboration on the Blue Economy, which encompasses sustainable fisheries, marine biodiversity conservation, renewable ocean energy, and eco-tourism. India's leadership in promoting these areas can contribute to the sustainable development of the region while addressing pressing environmental concerns such as climate change, marine pollution, and the degradation of marine ecosystems.

In view of the ecological richness and fragility of the Indian Ocean, the Committee underscore the importance of integrating environmental sustainability into India's regional strategy. India's large coastline and

maritime population make this imperative even more urgent. To effectively address these environmental and economic challenges, the Committee recommend that MEA should align India's Indian Ocean policy with global and regional environmental priorities and deepen its efforts to promote regional cooperation on marine conservation, renewable energy, and sustainable fisheries. Moreover, the Committee stress that it is now time for India to champion the concept of a *Green MAHASAGAR*, which would focus on collaborative initiatives with littoral states for marine protection, disaster response, and climate adaptation. As part of the Green MAHASAGAR framework, India should promote and coordinate efforts for the protection of marine ecosystems, the reduction of marine pollution, and the adoption of climate-resilient practices across the Indian Ocean Region.

(Recommendation No. 7)

8. India's Maritime Security Architecture in IOR

The Indian Ocean is a critical component of India's maritime security, strategically connecting South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. With a coastline extending over 11,098 km and an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) spanning approximately 2.3-2.4 million square kilometers, India exercises considerable influence over regional maritime dynamics. Its maritime domain, encompassing nine coastal states and four island territories, is a vast and resource-rich area that supports critical economic activities such as fishing, ocean mining, and offshore drilling for oil and gas. This geographic advantage, coupled with deep civilizational and cultural ties with neighboring countries, places India in a central role in shaping regional maritime stability. As India's strategic, economic, and security interests in the IOR grow, its maritime security is increasingly intertwined with the broader stability of the region. While noting that the IOR will remain a vital conduit for security, energy and connectivity, it will be also a space for intense geo-political contestations and competitions.

In view of the traditional non-traditional threats in IOR, the Committee desire that India should keep a close watch and coordinate with our friendly foreign countries to ensure that our interests are fully protected. The Committee further recommend that India should adopt a comprehensive approach and framework that combines technological innovation, strengthened regional cooperation, military readiness, and robust diplomatic engagement. By enhancing its maritime operational capabilities and deepening strategic relationships with regional partners, India should safeguard its national interests while contributing to the long-term security and stability of the Indian Ocean Region. The Committee further suggest that the Government should give careful consideration to the establishment of adequate ship repair and maintenance facilities in the island countries.

(Recommendation No. 8)

9. Countering Chinese Expansion and Influence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)

The Committee express concern regarding the escalating Chinese presence and its increasing influence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), a development which poses substantial risks to India's national security and broader strategic interests. The Committee recognizes that China's enhanced naval capabilities, exemplified by the growing size of its fleet, including over 15 units commissioned annually, has now surpassed the United States Navy, making it the world's largest naval force. The induction of advanced warships, including multiple Carrier Battle Groups and an additional aircraft carrier, along with the regular deployment of Chinese submarines and naval vessels, demonstrates a clear and growing strategic interest by China in consolidating its position in the IOR.

The strategic positioning of Chinese military and commercial infrastructure across key maritime chokepoints, particularly under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the “String of Pearls” strategy, is gradually reconfiguring the region's geopolitical dynamics in favor of

Chinese interests. Of equal concern is the strengthening of the China-Pakistan naval nexus, which not only facilitates joint military exercises but also advances Pakistan's naval modernization. This cooperation complicates the security situation further, particularly in the context of the increasing Chinese influence over Pakistan's naval assets, which could destabilize the balance of power in the region.

The Committee believe that these developments must be addressed with urgency, as they have the potential to shift the balance of power in the region, challenging India's strategic autonomy and undermining its influence over key maritime chokepoints. In the considered view of the Committee, India must remain proactive in countering the combined naval threat from China and Pakistan by bolstering its own deterrence capabilities and conducting joint exercises with partner countries to maintain strategic balance. The Committee urge the Government to enhance Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) through further integration of advanced technologies, such as satellite-based surveillance systems and Artificial Intelligence, to monitor Chinese activities more effectively. This should be complemented by a significant upgradation in naval capabilities, including the induction of advanced anti-submarine warfare (ASW) vessels, surveillance aircrafts, and nuclear-powered submarines, ensuring India's readiness to respond to any emerging threat. India should also deepen its strategic alliances with regional powers and global partners, particularly through forums such as the Quad, to ensure collective security and strengthen deterrence. Building closer ties with IOR littoral states through defense cooperation, capacity-building initiatives, and joint maritime operations will be crucial in countering Chinese influence.

(Recommendation No.9)

10. Combating Piracy in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)

The Committee acknowledge the persistent and evolving challenge of piracy in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), particularly in areas like the

Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, where the resurgence of piracy, exacerbated by regional instability and conflicts such as the Houthi attacks, has led to significant disruptions in global shipping routes. The Committee stress the critical need for sustained bilateral and multilateral cooperation to effectively combat piracy and secure maritime trade routes. The Committee, therefore, strongly recommend that India should continue to play a proactive role in regional frameworks such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), fostering collaborative efforts to enhance joint patrolling, intelligence-sharing, and conducting regular maritime security exercises with regional and international partners. India should also leverage cutting-edge technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), machine learning, and big data analytics to enhance real-time surveillance and threat detection.

(Recommendation No.10)

11. Combating Narcotics Trafficking in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)

The Committee note with concern the the rising threat of narcotics trafficking in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), which is increasingly intertwined with issues such as terrorism, organized crime, and regional instability. The growing volume of illicit drugs transiting through this strategic maritime corridor is fuelling parallel economies that finance terrorism and exacerbate security challenges. While the Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard (ICG) have conducted several successful Anti-Narcotics Operations (ANO), resulting in significant narcotics seizures, the Committee believes that current efforts are insufficient to effectively address the expanding scale of trafficking. The Committee emphasizes that this menace poses significant domestic security challenges, particularly to India's coastal states, which are increasingly vulnerable due to their proximity to critical maritime routes. The presence of organized criminal networks in these areas not only endangers the local populations but also threatens broader national security.

In view of these challenges, the Committee recommend a comprehensive strengthening of India's coastal surveillance infrastructure, significantly enhancing human, financial and technological resources dedicated to counter-narcotics operations. The Committee also highlight the critical importance of enhancing state capacity and infrastructure along with regional and international cooperation through improved intelligence-sharing platforms and more robust legal frameworks. Additionally, given, the vital role of local communities in preventing narcotics smuggling, the Committee urge the expansion of the Indian Coast Guard's Community Interaction Programs (CIPs), and call for enhanced deployment of Coast Guards vessels in affected coastal states, particularly in the West Coast.

(Recommendation No.11)

12. India's Maritime Strategy in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)

The Committee recognize the evolving maritime security landscape in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), particularly in the context of rapid geopolitical realignments and growing security challenges, including piracy, narcotics trafficking, and the strategic influence of regional and global powers. The Committee commend the efforts of the Indian Navy, Indian Coast Guard (ICG), and various law enforcement agencies in enhancing coastal security, as evidenced by the successful conduct of the biennial Exercise Sea Vigil, the establishment of Joint Operation Centres (JOCs), and the effective coordination through the National Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence Network (NC31).

While emphasizing the urgent need to elevate India's maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) as a foreign policy priority, the Committee believe that a far more comprehensive approach is required. Despite commendable progress in maritime security efforts, the Committee feel that India's existing strategy requires additional depth, clarity, and sustained resources to effectively assert its influence

and maintain deterrence in the IOR. To address this gap, the Committee recommend that India should prioritize the modernization of its naval capabilities, with a clear commitment to long-term, robust funding for its maritime security initiatives. Additionally, the Committee stress the importance of improving coordination and integration of maritime security operations across national and regional agencies, ensuring a unified and comprehensive approach to safeguarding India's interests in the region.

(Recommendation No.12)

13. Role of the Indian Navy in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)

The Committee acknowledge the critical and expanding role of the Indian Navy and the Indian Coast Guard in safeguarding India's national maritime interests and securing the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The Indian Navy's four key roles – military, constabulary, benign and diplomatic- serve as the cornerstone of India's maritime security strategy. These roles are becoming increasingly crucial as piracy, maritime terrorism, and illegal activities in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) pose growing threats to India's Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) and trade routes. The ICG's expanding mandate to secure India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and provide coastal security is equally critical in ensuring the country's maritime interests.

While the Indian Navy and Coast Guard have demonstrated significant operational effectiveness, there are numerous challenges that need urgent attention to ensure India's naval forces remain a modern, capable deterrent force. These challenges primarily concern fleet readiness, personnel training, and logistical support, which must be addressed to cope with emerging threats in the maritime domain. The Committee strongly recommend that the Government should invest in the modernization of capabilities of the Indian Navy and Coast Guard by prioritizing the development and induction of indigenous platforms

through the Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiative. The Committee recommend that the Government should prioritize enhancing the Navy's fleet with advanced platforms, such as next-generation submarines, destroyers, and carrier-based fighters, to improve its deterrence and operational readiness. Additionally, the ICG must be further empowered with modern assets, including specialized patrol vessels and surveillance aircraft, to enhance its ability to monitor and secure India's vast maritime boundaries.

(Recommendation No.13)

14. Provisioning of Adequate Financial support to Maritime Forces

The Committee underscore the need for adequate and sustained financial allocations to support the modernization efforts of both the Indian Navy and the Indian Coast Guard. As the strategic importance of India's maritime security grows and emerging threats in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) become more pronounced, it is crucial that the government's financial commitment aligns with the evolving demands of maritime defense. To effectively counter these threats, the Committee advocate increased funding to procure advanced technologies and to expand naval modernization programmes, including the acquisition of next-generation platforms, submarines, and surveillance systems. Without sufficient budgetary provisions, India's maritime forces may be unable to meet the future security challenges that lie ahead.

(Recommendation No.14)

15. Enhancing Coordination Among Maritime Agencies

The Committee emphasize the need for enhanced coordination among India's maritime forces and agencies, including the Indian Navy, Coast Guard, Ministries of External Affairs, Defence, and Home Affairs, as well as with external partners in the international maritime community. Joint operations, intelligence-sharing, and multilateral

exercises with nations such as the United States, Japan, and Australia should be integrated more effectively into India's security framework. The Committee suggest that India should prioritize formalizing and expanding such collaborations, particularly in the areas of Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) and interoperability. Furthermore, streamlined communication protocols both within national agencies and with international partners are crucial to ensure that India maintains a proactive and responsive maritime security posture.

(Recommendation No.15)

16. Maritime Infrastructure and Enhancing Connectivity through Sagarmala 2.0

The Committee note that Sagarmala is the flagship initiative of the Government of India that aims to boost India's maritime sector by enhancing port connectivity, developing inland waterways, and promoting industrial growth. While significant progress has been made under Sagarmala, the Government has launched Sagarmala 2.0 to further enhance India's maritime competitiveness. However, the Committee note that the Ministry of External Affairs has not sufficiently articulated the specific objectives and distinguishing features of Sagarmala 2.0 in both oral and written submissions. The Committee recommend that the Ministry should explicitly outline Sagarmala 2.0's objectives, placing greater emphasis on advancing smart port infrastructure, integrating digital technologies, and building multimodal transport networks that go beyond traditional port development. It is crucial to define specific metrics and performance indicators that distinguish Sagarmala 2.0 from its predecessor, enabling more accurate and effective assessment of its impact.

(Recommendation No.16)

17. Enhancing Maritime Domain Awareness and Regional Cooperation

The Committee note that India has made significant strides in improving Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) through initiatives such as the Information Fusion Centre - Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), as well as bilateral cooperation with neighbouring countries like Mauritius, Seychelles, and Sri Lanka. Additionally, the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) initiative, launched in 2022, has provided a crucial technological framework to address emerging maritime security challenges. Despite these positive developments, the Committee believe that there could be greater collaboration of maritime surveillance systems and broader collaboration among regional states and international partners.

The Committee recommend that India should further enhance its leadership role in maritime security cooperation by formalizing data-sharing agreements and promoting joint surveillance initiatives with regional partners. India should also consider expanding its role in regional maritime security dialogues, such as the Quad Maritime Security Working Group (QMSWG) and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), to facilitate multilateral responses to maritime challenges.

(Recommendation No.17)

18. Enhancing Bilateral and Multilateral Diplomacy

The Committee acknowledge India's active participation and leadership in various multilateral institutions and regional groupings in the Indian Ocean Region such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)), Mekong - Ganga Cooperation (MGC) and others. However, despite this broad engagement, the Committee observe that India's approach remains fragmented, lacking the strategic coherence necessary to fully leverage these platforms to advance its geopolitical, economic and strategic interests.

The Committee recommend strengthening of bilateral arrangements to protect the interests of fishermen who may inadvertently cross international maritime boundaries and encounter law enforcement interception by neighbouring countries. The Government should establish bilateral mechanisms to safeguard the interests of the fishermen and ensure their speedy release as well as of their boats and equipments.

The Committee, further recommend that the Government should adopt a more coherent, outcome-driven, and strategically aligned approach to harmonize India's initiatives in the IOR. This should be accompanied by enhanced inter-ministerial coordination, increased financial and technical commitments, promotion of synergy among overlapping forums, and periodic evaluation of outcomes. In addition, there is an urgent need for establishment of a centralized coordinating mechanism within the Ministry of External Affairs.

(Recommendation No.18)

19. Revitalizing Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)

The Committee note that the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), established in 1987 with its Secretariat in Mauritius, was created to revive the historic pan-Indian Ocean connectivity among countries. Over the years, IORA's membership has expanded to 23 Member States and 12 Dialogue Partners. The primary sources of funding for IORA include an annual membership fee of USD 24,000 from Member States and voluntary contributions from both Member States and Dialogue Partners to the IORA Special Fund, with India being the largest contributor. During the oral evidence, the Ministry emphasized that India places the highest priority on IORA and is focused on strengthening the institutional, financial, and legal frameworks of the organization to unlock its true potential. Efforts are being made to consolidate and streamline initiatives to promote cooperation in IORA's six priority areas and two cross-cutting themes.

The Committee acknowledge IORA's promise as a transformative platform for regional economic growth, sustainable development, and maritime cooperation. However, despite India's substantial contributions and a vast membership, the organization's full potential remains untapped. With its diverse membership, including 23 Member States, 12 Dialogue Partners, and an expanding number of stakeholders, IORA is well-positioned to act as a catalyst for peace, development, and shared prosperity in the Indian Ocean region. Recognizing the need for a strategic overhaul, the Committee strongly recommend that, in light of India's forthcoming Chairship of IORA from 2025-2027, India should assume a leading role in revitalizing the organization. This includes prioritizing the strengthening of IORA's institutional framework and governance. Specifically, the Committee recommend that the Ministry should streamline the Secretariat's operations, enhance coordination among Member States, and explore innovative funding mechanisms to enable more effective implementation of projects.

(Recommendation No.19)

20. Expanding IORA's Priorities to Address emerging regional challenges

Considering that the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) has emerged as a leading platform for regional cooperation, spanning key sectors such as trade, maritime safety, disaster risk management, fisheries, tourism, and the emerging blue economy, the Committee observe that the organization undertakes cooperation activities under six priority areas- science and technology, disaster risk management, maritime safety, trade and investment facilitation, fisheries management, and tourism - as well as two cross-cutting issues: the blue economy and women's economic empowerment.

The Committee is of the opinion that, while these areas remain critical, there is an urgent need to broaden the scope of IORA's priorities to encompass emerging challenges and opportunities. The Committee

suggest that additional priority areas, such as cyber-security, regional health cooperation, and disaster resilience, which are becoming increasingly significant in the context of global challenges facing the Indian Ocean region should be included. To advance this goal, the Committee urge the Government to strengthen collaborative efforts between IORA's functional bodies, Dialogue Partners, and other regional organizations. By fostering closer partnerships and aligning priorities with the evolving needs of the region, IORA can ensure that its actions remain relevant and effective in addressing contemporary and future challenges.

(Recommendation No.20)

21. Strengthening collaborative efforts under the Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI)

The Committee note that the Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI), launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2019, is a critical platform aimed at managing, conserving, and securing the maritime domain in the Indo-Pacific region. The initiative spans seven pillars: Maritime Security, Maritime Ecology, Maritime Resources, Capacity Building and Resource Sharing, Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM), Science, Technology and Academic Cooperation, and Trade Connectivity and Maritime Transport. India has taken the lead on key pillars, including Maritime Security and DRRM, while collaborating with like-minded nations such as the United Kingdom, Australia, France, Indonesia and Japan to co-lead other pillars. This growing network of cooperation is reflective of a shared commitment among countries to address pressing maritime challenges through practical, project-based collaboration.

While noticing significant progress made under the Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI), the Committee consider the current membership of just 15 countries as limiting its potential impact. The

Committee believe that expanding membership to include more countries, especially those with significant maritime stakes, would be useful for enhancing the effectiveness and inclusivity of IPOI. The Committee also recommend that India should play a more active role in strengthening and expanding collaboration within each of the seven pillars. In particular, the Committee highlight the need for greater focus on emerging challenges such as cybersecurity in the maritime domain, regional health cooperation, and disaster resilience, which should be integrated into IPOI's framework.

(Recommendation No.21)

22. Enhancing resource mobilization and capacity building under the Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI)

The Committee recognize the growing importance of resource mobilization for the long-term success of the Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI). In this regard, the Committee recommend that India should explore innovative funding mechanisms, including the establishment of a dedicated IPOI Trust Fund, to support sustainable projects and enhance resource mobilization. In the considered view of the Committee, capacity building is a key area where India's Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme can be further leveraged to provide specialized training, particularly in sectors such as maritime security, disaster management, and blue economy. The Committee also urge the Government to continue its diplomatic efforts to raise awareness about IPOI and its goals, using existing regional frameworks such as Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and the East Asia Summit.

(Recommendation No.22)

23. Fostering Regional Cooperation through BIMSTEC

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a grouping of seven Member States lying in the littoral and adjacent areas of the Bay of Bengal: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand. BIMSTEC represents a cornerstone of India's engagement with its neighbors in the Indian Ocean region as a convergence of its 'Neighbourhood First' outlook, the 'Act East Policy' and the 'SAGAR' vision. The Committee note that BIMSTEC has been playing a crucial role in improving our cooperation with the other six member states on a large spectrum of issues including security, trade facilitation, people-to-people contact, connectivity, institutional building, and collaboration in health, space, and digital infrastructure. India's leadership in key areas such as maritime security, disaster management, and energy cooperation, as well as its initiatives like the BIMSTEC Ports Conclave, the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate, and disaster management exercises, positions the country at the forefront of regional integration.

The Committee recommend that India should continue to leverage BIMSTEC as a strategic tool in its Indian Ocean policy. Given the evolving geopolitical dynamics of the Indian Ocean Region, BIMSTEC must continue to be a critical platform for India's regional security, economic growth, and sustainable development. India, as the lead country in BIMSTEC's Security Pillar, should focus on strengthening maritime cooperation by implementing Multi-Lateral Engagement at Sea (MLEAs) guidelines and enhancing maritime domain awareness. India's successful initiatives, such as hosting the BIMSTEC Ports Conclave and supporting the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate (BCWC), should be further expanded to strengthen regional connectivity and address emerging climate challenges.

(Recommendation No.23)

24. Flexible Security Framework in the Quad to enhance regional stability

The Committee note that Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), comprising India, the United States, Japan, and Australia, has evolved from its initial focus on disaster response into a vital strategic partnership aimed at promoting a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific, grounded in principles of international law and respect for sovereignty. India's vision for the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), articulated through the principles of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), aligns with the Quad's growing emphasis on enhancing maritime security. The Committee note that Quad's naval cooperation is designed to enhance interoperability and interchangeability, share intelligence, and conduct joint patrols to ensure the safety of sea lanes and deter potential traditional and non-traditional threats. As a net security provider in the region, India's role is critical in addressing transnational threats such as illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, piracy, and other maritime crimes. In this context, the Committee feel that Quad presents a valuable opportunity for India to bolster its maritime strategy and strengthen its strategic footprint in the IOR.

The Committee understand India's cautious approach towards a security-centric Quad due to its policy of multi-alignment. However, given the complex geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific, the Committee recommend that a more flexible security dimension within the Quad framework may be explored by including initiatives such as conducting joint maritime exercises in the Indian Ocean, aimed at improving coordination, enhancing maritime domain awareness (MDA), and better preparedness for emerging security challenges. Proactive steps taken to deepen the Quad's security cooperation, without compromising its multi-alignment approach, focused on non-confrontational exercises and capacity-building initiatives, could

significantly enhance regional stability and strengthen India's role as a responsible maritime power in the IOR.

(Recommendation No.24)

25. Aligning Quad Cooperation with India's Vision for Sustainable Infrastructure and Connectivity in the Indian Ocean Region

India's approach to the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is firmly rooted in the principles of sustainable and transparent development. In this context, the Committee are of the considered view that Quad's cooperation with India's Indian Ocean vision, particularly through the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), holds significant potential for advancing regional infrastructure and connectivity while ensuring long-term sustainability. The Committee strongly recommend that India should work closely with its Quad partners to ensure that infrastructure projects in the region align with sustainable development goals and fosters economic growth without compromising the region's financial stability or sovereignty.

(Recommendation No.25)

26. IFC-IOR and Quad's Maritime Technologies

For strengthening regional security, the Committee suggest that the Government may consider bolstering information sharing between the Information Fusion Center-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) and Quad's advanced maritime technologies to significantly enhance the region's ability to respond to emerging security threats, such as illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, piracy, and other transnational maritime crimes.

(Recommendation No.26)

27. Advancing the Quad Ports of the Future Partnership and Infrastructure Development in the Indo-Pacific

The Committee note that the Quad Ports of the Future Partnership was announced in 2024 to coordinate, exchange information & best practices, and mobilize government & private sector investments in quality port infrastructure across the Indo-Pacific region. Further, India will host a Quad Regional Ports and Transportation Conference, in Mumbai this year with a view to increasing knowledge, facilitating dialogue, and exchanging experiences on advanced ports and logistics practices. This will complement the work Quad partners have done to boost infrastructure expertise across the Indo-Pacific region through the Quad Infrastructure Fellowships. Keeping this in view, the Committee recommend that India should take a proactive leadership role in advancing the Ports of the Future Partnership initiated by the Quad for modernizing ports, improving trade infrastructure, and promoting environmentally responsible practices across the Indo-Pacific region.

(Recommendation No.27)

28. Scaling up MAITRI Initiative for enhanced maritime cooperation in Maritime Domain Awareness

The Committee understand that the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) initiative announced in 2022 aims to provide near-real-time, integrated, and cost-effective maritime domain data to maritime agencies in the region; support regional capacity in combating a wide range of illicit maritime activities, including illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and respond to climate-related and humanitarian events, covering three major sub-regions in the Indo-Pacific maritime space- the Pacific Islands, Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean Region. The Committee are happy to note further that the India-led initiative MAITRI (Maritime Training Institute - containerized and mobile training infrastructure for easy deployment

to multiple locations of interest) enables partner countries in the Indo Pacific region to maximize tools provided through IPMDA and other Quad partner initiatives, to monitor and secure their waters, enforce their laws, and deter unlawful behavior. It is learned that India will host the inaugural MAITRI workshop in 2025 which aims to assess the capability gaps in the region and enhance the maritime capabilities in consultation with regional partners. Given Quad's commitment to regional security and capacity building, particularly in the maritime domain, the Committee recommend that initiatives like the Maritime Training Institute (MAITRI) should be expanded to ensure that regional partners are equipped with the necessary tools, knowledge, and technologies to effectively monitor and secure their maritime domains.

(Recommendation No.28)

29. Leveraging India's Chairmanship of IONS for enhanced maritime cooperation

The Committee are aware that the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), established in 2008 and comprises of 25 states and 9 observer states aims to strengthen maritime security and promote collaborative efforts among Navies of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region to address common challenges in the Indian Ocean Region. The Ministry has informed that IONS has established 3 working groups to focus on key areas, namely Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), Maritime Security and Information Sharing & Interoperability. The Committee stress the need for expanding regional cooperation on emerging non-traditional security challenges such as Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing and climate change. Towards achieving this end, the Committee urge India to make efforts in fostering a more collaborative environment which includes sharing of information not only between governments but also between industry and government. While appreciating the pivotal role played by India as a founding member and leader of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) in shaping the

regional maritime security landscape, the Committee are hopeful that after assumption of the Chairmanship of IONS for the 2025-27 India would leverage this opportunity to further enhance regional maritime security, cooperation, and humanitarian assistance within the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). By fostering stronger engagement with IONS observer nations and promoting a collective maritime governance framework, India should ensure that IONS transitions into an active, impactful organization that contributes meaningfully to peace, stability, and maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region. To strengthen regional maritime security, the Committee recommend that India should intensify efforts to enhance interoperability among IONS member navies through regular joint exercises and the development of common Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

(Recommendation No.29)

30. Institutionalizing Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) within IONS framework

The Committee commend India's demonstrated leadership in providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) during natural disasters, such as Cyclone Idai in Mozambique, and in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of India's leadership in IONS, the Committee recommend that India should further institutionalize these efforts within the IONS framework by coordinating joint HADR exercises and establishing standard protocols for rapid disaster response. India should work with IONS member states to develop common frameworks for disaster response, ensuring a swift, coordinated, and effective regional approach to humanitarian crises. By strengthening IONS' capabilities in HADR, India can reinforce its commitment to regional stability, while also demonstrating the organization's practical and collaborative potential in addressing humanitarian emergencies.

(Recommendation No.30)

31. Strengthening cultural diplomacy in the Indian Ocean Region

Recognizing the profound historical, religious, trade, and cultural ties between India and the countries of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), the Committee acknowledge the significant progress made in strengthening these relations through various initiatives, including the establishment of Cultural Centers, sponsoring visits of performing art groups, organizing conferences, and promoting Indian languages and heritage. Given the strategic importance of cultural diplomacy in furthering India's ties with IOR countries, the Committee strongly urge that the Indian Missions and Cultural Centers be further reinforced and adequately resourced. These institutions serve not only as platforms for showcasing India's diverse cultural heritage but also as vital spaces where the diaspora communities can reconnect with their roots and identity. To this end, the Committee urge increased allocation of funds to support a broad spectrum of cultural activities such as events, art exhibitions, and festivals that showcase India's rich cultural diversity. Such initiatives will further elevate India's cultural profile, stimulate greater Diaspora engagement and foster a deeper cultural bond between India and the region.

(Recommendation No.31)

32. Proactive Engagement with the Indian Diaspora to support India's IOR Strategy

The Committee acknowledge the significant presence of the Indian diaspora in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), which constitutes 53% of the total Indian overseas population, and acknowledge their potential to serve as a meaningful voice in fostering stronger bilateral ties. The Committee note that the Ministry has formulated a multifaceted Diaspora engagement policy framework characterized under the rubric of 4Cs - Care, Connect, Celebrate, and Contribute. It is also observed

that initiatives such as Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) and its regional editions (RPBD), Know India Programme (KIP), the Promotion of Cultural Ties with Diaspora (PCTD), Scholarship Programme for Diaspora Children (SPDC), etc. play a vital role in strengthening cultural identity, educational ties, and India's soft power globally. The Committee are of the opinion that current Diaspora engagement efforts, though commendable, can be further imbued with an appreciation of the needs of the Diaspora and the importance of their voices in strengthening bilateral relations between their countries and India. By adopting a sharper strategic focus and nurturing sustained two-way communication, the Diaspora can play a significant role as a positive contributor to India's regional and global efforts and thereby strengthen India's soft power and fostering greater goodwill in the Indian Ocean Region.

(Recommendation No.32)

New Delhi
11 August, 2025
20 Shrawana, 1947 (Saka)

Dr. Shashi Tharoor,
Chairperson,
Committee on External Affairs

Appendix-I

MINUTES OF THE EIGHTH SITTING OF THE COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (2024-25) HELD ON 18 DECEMBER, 2024

The Committee sat on Wednesday, 18 December, 2024 from 1600 hrs. to 1730 hrs. in Committee Room 'C', Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi.

Present

Dr. Shashi Tharoor, Chairperson

Lok Sabha

2. Smt. D. K. Aruna
3. Shri Mitesh Patel Bakabhai
4. Shri Arun Govil
5. Shri Deepender Singh Hooda
6. Shri Navaskani K.
7. Shri Brijendra Singh Ola
8. Shri Sanatan Pandey
9. Shri Ravi Shankar Prasad
10. Smt. Aparajita Sarangi
11. Shri Arvind Ganpat Sawant
12. Ms. Praniti Sushilkumar Shinde

Rajya Sabha

13. Dr. John Brittas
14. Smt. Kiran Choudhry
15. Dr. K. Laxman
16. Ms. Kavita Patidar
17. Shri A. D. Singh
18. Kunwar Ratanjeet Pratap Narayan Singh
19. Dr. Sudhanshu Trivedi
20. Shri Rajeev Shukla

Secretariat

- | | | | |
|----|---------------------------|---|------------------|
| 1. | Shri Anjani Kumar | - | Joint Secretary |
| 2. | Smt. Reena Gopalakrishnan | - | Director |
| 3. | Ms. K. Muanniang Tunglut | - | Deputy Secretary |

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

S No.	Name of the Officer	Designation
1.	Shri Jaideep Mazumdar	Secretary (East)
2.	Shri Puneet Agrawal	Additional Secretary (IOR)
3.	Ms. Pratibha Parkar	Joint Secretary (Parliament & Coordination)
4.	Shri Balasubramanian Shyam	Joint Secretary (BM)
5.	Smt. Paramita Tripathi	Joint Secretary (Oceania)
6.	Shri Siddhartha Nath	Joint Secretary (Indo-Pacific)
7.	Ms. Vishakha Yaduvanshi	Director (Indo-Pacific)

2. At the outset, Hon'ble Chairperson welcomed the Members of the Committee and the representatives of the Ministry of External Affairs and apprised them of the agenda i.e. briefing on the subject 'Evaluation of India's Indian Ocean Strategy', selected for examination and report to Parliament. Highlighting some of the important issues to be discussed, he drew the attention of the witnesses to Direction 55 (1) of the Directions by the Speaker, Lok Sabha pertaining to maintaining the confidentiality of the Proceedings and Direction 58 of the Directions by the Speaker, Lok Sabha and requested the witnesses to introduce themselves before making submissions before the Committee.

3. In his opening statement, Secretary (East) presented an overview of the Indian Ocean region, significance of the Indian Ocean for India and the shared civilizational and cultural links with the countries in the region. He then briefed the Committee on the guiding principles of India's Indian Ocean policy; bilateral strategic partnerships with countries like Mauritius, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Seychelles; multilateral strategic partnerships and groupings such as the Quad, IPOI, BIMSTEC, IORA, Indian Ocean Commission, Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, etc.; maritime security and anti-piracy operations; Joint EEZ surveillance exercise; maritime domain awareness; capacity building; annual conferences on issues of maritime security; disaster relief and humanitarian assistance; connectivity with countries of the region;

development partnerships; development of ports and cultural and diaspora links, etc.

4. Thereafter, Members of the Committee as well as the Chair raised various issues which *inter alia* included the impact of initiatives taken in the Indian Ocean region in the pursuit of India's foreign policy objectives; re-energizing IORA; impact of China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean region and India's response; India's efforts at countering piracy; progress in implementing the SAGAR initiatives; Indian Ocean Region Strategic Review Act of 2024 and its bearing on India; encroachment in the IOR and threats from IUU fishing and smuggling of arms and drugs; institutionalizing maritime infrastructure and cooperation; role of Quad in the IOR; challenges in ensuring free, safe and secure Indian Ocean region; etc.

5. The representatives of the Ministry responded to the queries of the Members. Before the Sitting concluded, hon'ble Chairperson directed the principal witness to furnish written replies on the points which could not be responded due to paucity of time, to the Secretariat of the Committee at the earliest.

(The witnesses then withdrew)

The Committee then adjourned

A verbatim record of the Proceedings has been kept on record.

Appendix-II

MINUTES OF THE TWENTY SECOND SITTING OF THE COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (2024-25) HELD ON 17 JUNE, 2025.

The Committee sat on Tuesday 17 June, 2025 from 1600 hrs. to 1845 hrs. in Main Committee Room, Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi.

Dr. Shashi Tharoor, Chairperson

Lok Sabha

2. Shri Arun Govil
3. Shri Deepender Singh Hooda
4. Shri Brijendra Singh Ola
5. Shri Asaduddin Owaisi
6. Shri Ravi Shankar Prasad
7. Shri Arvind Ganpat Sawant
8. Shri Naveen Jindal

Rajya Sabha

9. Smt. Kiran Choudhry
10. Shri A. D. Singh
11. Kunwar Ratanjeet Pratap Narayan Singh
12. Dr. Sudhanshu Trivedi
13. Shri Rajeev Shukla

Secretariat

1. Smt. Reena Gopalakrishnan - Director

Ministry of External Affairs

S.	Name of the officer	Designation
1.	Shri Periasamy Kumaran	Secretary East [Leader of Delegation]
2.	Shri Puneet Agrawal	Additional Secretary (IOR)
3.	Ms. Pratibha Parkar	Joint Secretary (Parl. & Coord.)
4.	Ms. Nabanita Chakrabarti	Joint Secretary (IP)

Ministry of Defence

S.	Name of the officer	Designation
1.	Shri Rajesh Kumar Singh	Defence Secretary
2.	Vice Admiral Atul Anand	Addl. Secretary, DMA
3.	Shri Vishwesh Negi	JS (IC/VN)
4.	Shri Manish Tripathi	JS (Parliament)
5.	Rear Admiral Vikram Menon	JS (Navy)
6.	Vice Admiral Krishna Swaminathan	VCNS
7.	Vice Admiral Nirbhay Bapna	ACNS (FCI)

2. At the outset, the Chairperson welcomed the Members to the Sitting of the Committee convened to take evidence of the representatives of the Ministries of External Affairs and Defence on the subject 'Evaluation of India's Indian Ocean Strategy'. A one-minute silence was observed in memory of the lives tragically lost in the recent Ahmedabad air crash. In his opening remarks, the Chairperson set the context for the discussions and highlighted the importance of adhering to Direction (55)1 of the Directions by the Speaker, Lok Sabha.

3. The Defence Secretary provided a comprehensive briefing on the maritime security situation in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). He outlined India's broader maritime interests, addressing both traditional and non-traditional challenges and threats in the IOR. The Secretary also elaborated on the role of Indian law enforcement agencies, including the Navy and Indian Coast Guard, in ensuring maritime security. This was further supplemented by a detailed PowerPoint presentation from a representative of the Indian Navy, focusing on the Navy's role in securing the IOR, joint military exercises, Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) patrolling, coastal security, Exercise Sea Vigil, and other related initiatives.

4. Thereafter, the representatives of the Ministry of External Affairs discussed key issues impacting India's maritime strategy, including the growing Chinese presence in the region, maritime trade, and defence and

diplomatic cooperation. They also highlighted India's evolving role as a first responder and net security provider in the IOR; Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR); Operation Sadbhav and Operation Brahma; SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions) frameworks; Sagarmala 2.0, and the Information Fusion Centre-IOR (IFC-IOR) in Gurugram.

5. The Members and the Chair raised various queries based on the testimonies given by the two Ministries. The key issues focussed on security implications of increasing Chinese presence in the region; naval modernization and capabilities from anti-piracy and checking narcotics smuggling to maritime infrastructure and role of regional organizations such as Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), the Quad, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in enhancing maritime security.

6. The representatives of the Ministries of External Affairs and Defence responded to the queries of the Members. Before the Sitting concluded, hon'ble Chairperson directed the principal witnesses to furnish written replies on the points which could not be responded due to paucity of time, to the Secretariat of the Committee at the earliest.

The Committee then adjourned

(The witnesses then withdrew)

A verbatim record of the Proceedings has been kept on record.

MINUTES OF THE TWENTY SEVENTH SITTING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (2024-25) HELD ON 06 AUGUST, 2025

The Committee sat from 1600 hrs. to 1705 hrs. in Main Committee Room, Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi.

Dr. Shashi Tharoor, Chairperson

Lok Sabha

- 2 Smt. D. K. Aruna
- 3 Shri Vijay Baghel
- 4 Shri Mitesh Patel Bakabhai
- 5 Shri Deepender Singh Hooda
- 6 Shri Navaskani K.
- 7 Shri Brijendra Singh Ola
- 8 Shri Sanatan Pandey
- 9 Dr. Pradeep Kumar Panigrahy
- 10 Shri Ravi Shankar Prasad
- 11 Smt. Aparajita Sarangi
- 12 Shri Arvind Ganpat Sawant
- 13 Ms. Praniti Sushilkumar Shinde
- 14 Shri Naveen Jindal

Rajya Sabha

- 15 Dr. John Brittas
- 16 Dr. K. Laxman
- 17 Ms. Kavita Patidar
- 18 Shri A. D. Singh
- 19 Shri Ratanjeet Pratap Narain Singh
- 20 Dr. Sudhanshu Trivedi

Secretariat

- | | | | |
|----|---------------------------|---|------------------|
| 1. | Shri. Anjani Kumar | - | Joint Secretary |
| 2. | Smt. Reena Gopalakrishnan | - | Director |
| 3. | Ms. Rachna Saxena | - | Deputy Secretary |

2. At the outset, the Chairperson welcomed the Members to the Sitting of the Committee.
3. The Committee took up for consideration the draft Report on the subject 'Evaluation of India's Indian Ocean Strategy'.
4. The Chairperson invited the Members to offer their suggestions, if any, for incorporation in the draft Report. After some deliberations, the Committee adopted the draft Report with some modifications.
5. The Committee then authorized the Chairperson to present the Report to Parliament.

The Committee then adjourned.

35 Littoral States of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)

No.	Littoral States where India has diplomatic presence	
1	Australia (Canberra)	High Commission of India, Canberra. 4 Consulates (Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney)
2	Bahrain (Manama)	Embassy of India, Manama.
3	Bangladesh (Dhaka)	High Commission of India, Dhaka. 4 Assistant High Commissions (Rajshahi, Chittagong, Khulna, Sylhet)
4	Djibouti (Djibouti City)	Embassy of India, Djibouti City.
5	Egypt (Cairo)	Embassy of India, Cairo.
6	Eritrea (Asmara)	Embassy of India, Asmara.
7	Indonesia (Jakarta)	Embassy of India, Jakarta. 2 Consulates (Medan, Bali)
8	India (New Delhi)	Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi
9	Iran (Tehran)	Embassy of India, Tehran. 2 Consulates (Zahedan, Bandar Abbas)
10	Iraq (Baghdad)	Embassy of India, Baghdad. Consulate General of India, Erbil (Kurdistan Region of Iraq).
11	Kenya (Nairobi)	High Commission of India, Nairobi. Assistant High Commission of India, Mombasa.
12	Kuwait (Kuwait City)	Embassy of India, Kuwait City.
13	Madagascar (Antananarivo)	Embassy of India, Antananarivo.
14	Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur)	High Commission of India, Kuala Lumpur.
15	Maldives (Malé)	High Commission of India, Malé.
16	Mauritius (Port Louis)	High Commission of India, Port Louis.
17	Mozambique (Maputo)	High Commission of India, Maputo.

No.	Littoral States where India has diplomatic presence	
18	Myanmar (Yangon)	Embassy of India, Yangon. 2 Consulates (Mandalay, Sittwe) CGI in Sittwe temporarily shifted to Yangon due to internal situation in Myanmar
19	Oman (Muscat)	Embassy of India, Muscat.
20	Pakistan (Islamabad)	High Commission of India, Islamabad.
21	Qatar (Doha)	Embassy of India, Doha.
22	Réunion (France)	Embassy of India, Paris (covers Réunion). Consulate General of India, Reunion Island.
23	Saudi Arabia (Riyadh, Jeddah)	Embassy of India, Riyadh. Consulate General of India, Jeddah.
24	Seychelles (Victoria)	High Commission of India, Victoria-Mahe.
25	Singapore (Singapore)	High Commission of India, Singapore.
26	South Africa (Pretoria)	High Commission of India, Pretoria. 3 Consulates (Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban)
27	Sri Lanka (Colombo)	High Commission of India, Colombo. Assistant High Commission of India, Kandy. 2 Consulates (Jaffna, Hambantota)
28	Sudan (Khartoum)	Embassy of India, Khartoum.
29	Tanzania (Dar es Salaam)	High Commission of India, Dar es Salaam. Consulate General of India, Zanzibar.
30	Timor-Leste (Dili)	Embassy of India, Dili (established on September 5, 2024)
31	Thailand (Bangkok)	Embassy of India, Bangkok. Consulate General of India, Chiangmai.
32	United Arab Emirates (Abu Dhabi, Dubai)	Embassy of India, Abu Dhabi. Consulate General of India, Dubai.