Enhancing India's maritime capabilities

What is the issue?

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- The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has long been significant and struggle for power in the region is gaining importance.
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- In this context, India must assess its maritime capabilities and respond with appropriate decisions.
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How are the power equations changing in the IOR?

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- Control over the sea lanes of commerce played a very important part in earlier colonial years.
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- But this had started dwindling in later years, as colonisation began to give way.
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- **US** - The United States gradually took over the dominant roles in the IOR.
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- For the last 50 years, it has been the only nation with credible maritime power in the region.
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- Until two decades ago, even India was content to let the US act as the net security provider in the IOR.
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- **China** - Having become a major importer of energy from this region, China is also now seeking an IOR presence.
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- Towards this end, its ships and submarines have started making presence in these waters frequently.

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- While facilities such as refuelling and the like are available at most ports, these cannot equal the support that a base could offer.
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- So, China is seeking to set up facilities at Gwadar (Pakistan) and Djibouti (in the Horn of Africa), which could support 10,000 personnel each.
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- While none of them can be said to be bases, they will give China the IOR credibility that it could otherwise not have.
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- **India** - The Indian Ocean Region holds a key to India's security interests.
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- Operating facilities in Indo-Pacific countries are essential for increasing India's naval reach.
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- It is also essential for making India a credible maritime power.
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How does the future look?

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- Countries are increasingly seeing support stations as vital for any meaningful operations at sea.
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- These are places where forces could be positioned, replenished and deployed for reasonably long durations.
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- Looked at holistically, in addition to the US, only China and India seem to hold considerable prospects to have some IOR capabilities.
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- China does have a good number of seagoing platforms, but presently not have the bases to enable their sustained operations.
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- On the other hand, India, with its regional presence, has the infrastructure but not the numbers.
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What lies before India?

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- **China** - A hostile presence, especially of the Chinese, can put India's assets under great threat.
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- Contrarily, India can interdict Chinese supply lines, if needed, provided such capabilities are created.
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- India must therefore work on this line.
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- **Indo-Pacific** - India must also focus on mutually compatible engagement of the principal Indo-Pacific littorals.
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- These include, apart from the US, Japan and Australia many other less focussed countries which include -
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i. South Africa and Mozambique which sit astride the southern routes.
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ii. Mauritius and Seychelles, which guard the approaches to the northern waters.
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iii. countries of the Gulf region.
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iv. immediate neighbours such as Sri Lanka and Maldives.
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- While bases at these places might not be feasible, operating facilities which enhance reach and endurance are needed.
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- **Besides**, India must make up the deficiencies, especially of submarines, whose numbers have fallen considerably.
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- Ships which can transport desired forces across the seas are also important.
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- Above all, the decision-making processes should be speeded up to enhance appropriately our maritime capabilities.
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Source: Business Standard

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