India’s Indian Ocean Region (IOR) Vision

Mains: *GS II – International Relations*

Why in News?

India’s strategic outlook in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is evolving into a multidimensional framework that combines maritime security, regional connectivity, economic cooperation, and emerging technology governance.

What is India’s maritime security and island diplomacy?

- **Regional strategy** – India’s engagement with island nations in the Indian Ocean has become a crucial element of its regional strategy.
- **Engagement with Seychelles** – Seychelles and India emphasised cooperation in maritime security, climate solutions, the blue economy, and sustainable development.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted that defence and maritime cooperation remain central pillars of India–Seychelles relations.

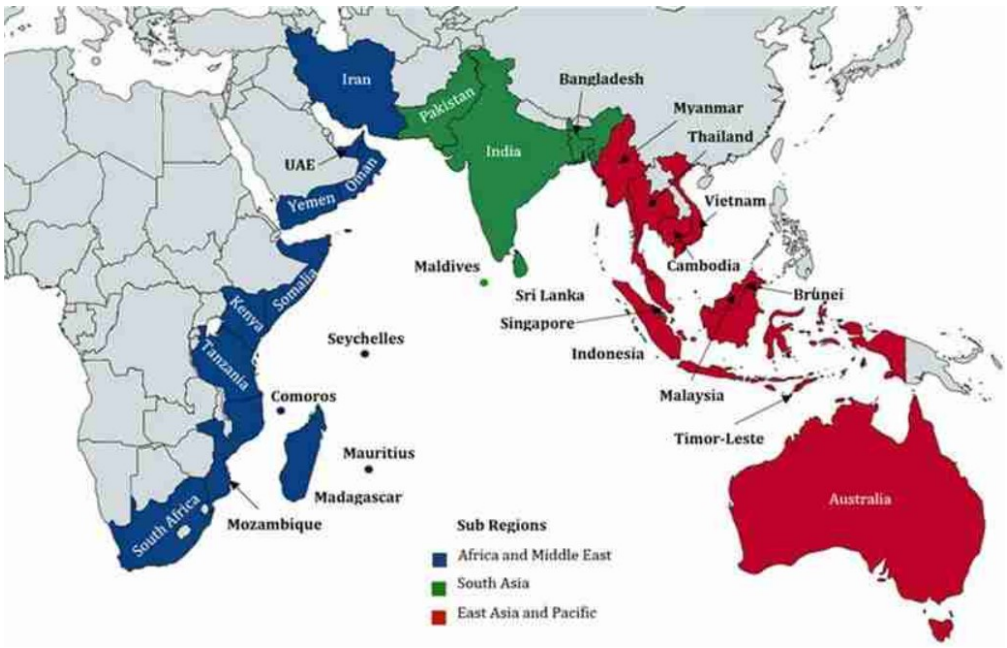
Seychelles, *an archipelago of 115 islands in the Western Indian Ocean, holds strategic importance due to its proximity to vital shipping lanes.*

- Nearly **80 % of India’s oil imports** pass through the Indian Ocean, making the security of sea lanes of communication essential for India’s economic and energy security.
- In this context, **island diplomacy** plays a significant role.

Island diplomacy *refers to a country’s strategic engagement with small island states through defence cooperation, economic assistance, climate support, and infrastructure development. India has supported Seychelles by providing patrol vessels, defence training, and capacity-building initiatives.*

- **Other areas of collaboration** – Cooperation between the two countries also includes **Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)**, coastal surveillance radar systems, and joint maritime security efforts.
- These initiatives strengthen the ability of small island states to monitor their waters, combat piracy, and prevent illegal fishing.
- **India positions** – India places itself as a **net security provider** in the region through initiatives aligned with the **MAHASAGAR vision**.

- This initiative builds upon the earlier **SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)** doctrine announced in 2015.
- Such engagement also helps India maintain its influence in the IOR amid increasing involvement of extra-regional actors and China's growing presence.



What is India's act east policy and the Malaysia connection?

- **Malaysia** – It is a key partner for India in the ASEAN and Indo-Pacific regions and is strategically located near the Strait of Malacca, one of the world's most important maritime chokepoints.
- **India and Malaysia** – They elevated their relations to a *Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP)* in August 2024.
- Such partnerships involve cooperation across multiple sectors including defence, trade, technology, education, and institutionalised high-level dialogues.
    - Seychelles represents India's strategic engagement in the Western Indian Ocean.
    - Malaysia reflects its expanding outreach towards Southeast Asia under the **Act East Policy**
- **PM visit** – Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Malaysia from February 7–8, 2026 further strengthened bilateral ties.
- One of the major outcomes of the visit was the consolidation of security cooperation aimed at promoting a rules-based maritime order in the Indo-Pacific and ensuring freedom of navigation.

India's Act East Policy, *launched in 2014 as an evolution of the Look East Policy of 1992, seeks deeper economic, political, and strategic integration with ASEAN countries.*

- In this context, India and Malaysia are expanding cooperation in defence exchanges, digital economy initiatives, trade facilitation, and semiconductor manufacturing.
- **Other collaborations** – Particularly significant is collaboration in semiconductors and

digital infrastructure, which indicates India's attempt to integrate into ASEAN's manufacturing and supply-chain networks.
- Supply-chain diversification has become a major strategic concern after disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- By strengthening ties with Malaysia, India also aims to attract Malaysian investments and position itself as a major investment destination.

What is the technology diplomacy and global digital governance of India?

- **India's position** – Alongside maritime and economic engagement, India is increasingly positioning itself as a leader in global digital governance and emerging technologies.
- **Critical technologies** – Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping governance systems, military capabilities, and global economic structures.
- The AI Impact Summit held in New Delhi from February 16–20, 2026 demonstrated India's growing role as a convening power in global AI governance discussions.
- **General Concerns** – AI ethics, data sovereignty, algorithmic accountability, and regulatory frameworks are becoming central to international politics.
- India's experience with digital public infrastructure, including platforms such as Aadhaar, Unified Payments Interface (UPI), and digital service delivery systems, has drawn global attention.
- These initiatives provide a scalable and affordable model for developing countries seeking technological advancement without excessive dependence on external actors.
- By promoting inclusive AI and digital governance, India seeks to present itself as a bridge between advanced economies and developing countries.
- This approach strengthens India's position as a representative voice of the Global South in debates surrounding technology governance.

What is India's multidimensional strategy in the Indian Ocean region?

- **Comprehensive strategy** – India's engagement in the Indian Ocean Region is no longer confined to traditional maritime security.
- Instead, it reflects a comprehensive strategy that integrates defence cooperation, economic connectivity, technological partnerships, and digital governance.
- **Island diplomacy with Seychelles** – This strengthens India's maritime presence in the Western Indian Ocean.
- **Other regional engagements** – Deeper engagement with Malaysia and ASEAN reinforces India's strategic position in Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific.
- **Global level** – leadership in digital governance and AI regulation enhances India's diplomatic influence.

What lies ahead?

- India's evolving approach to the Indian Ocean Region demonstrates a coherent vision that combines security, connectivity, and technological leadership.
- Through maritime cooperation with island nations, strategic partnerships with Southeast Asian countries, and proactive engagement in global digital governance, India is strengthening its regional influence while also positioning itself as a leading

voice of the Global South in shaping the emerging international order.

Reference

The Indian Express| IOR vision of India

