Significance of Agaléga Island's development for India

Why in news?

Recently India and Mauritius jointly inaugurated the new Airstrip and St. James Jetty along with six community development projects at the Agalega Island in Mauritius.

What is the history of India-Mauritius relationship?

- **Historical relation-** The historical ties between Mauritius and India have been deeply rooted, with a significant influence on the cultural, social, and political aspects of the island nation.
- **Pre-independence period**-Mauritius maintained connections with India during successive Dutch, French, and British occupations. Indian workers began arriving in Mauritius from the 1820s to work on sugar plantations.
- **Abolition of Slavery, 1834**-Following the abolition of slavery by British in 1834, large numbers of Indian indentured labourers were brought to Mauritius.

The arrival of the ship 'Atlas' on this day carrying the first batch of Indian indentured labourers is observed as 'Aapravasi Day' in Mauritius.

- **Mahatma Gandhi's visit**- He had a brief stopover in Mauritius en route to India from South Africa in 1901 while awaiting the departure of his ship SS Nowshera.
- Barrister Manillal Doctor, on Gandhiji's suggestion, arrived in Mauritius in 1907 who played a crucial role in organizing the Mauritian Indian community and laying the foundation for their struggle for political and social rights

The National Day of Mauritius is celebrated on March 12 every year, marking the date when the Dandi Salt March was launched which serves as a tribute to Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian freedom struggle.

- **Diplomatic relations**- Mauritius was one of the handful of important countries with which independent India established diplomatic relations in 1948, even before the independence of Mauritius
- **Post-independence**- Mauritius got independence in 1968, it emphasized the centrality of India in Mauritius' foreign policy.
- **Bilateral trade**-India has been among the largest trading partners of Mauritius since 2005 and the trade has grown by 132% in the last 17 years (2005-2019)

Petroleum products have been the largest export item for India.

- **Bilateral agreements**- India and Mauritius have signed a wide range of bilateral agreements like Double Taxation Avoidance Convention, Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement, Extradition treaty etc.,
- **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA)**- It was signed in 2021 which is the 1st trade Agreement signed by India with a country in Africa.
- **Development projects**- Indian-assisted projects in Mauritius include the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, the Upadhyay Training Centre, Cyber Tower at Ebene etc.,
- **Cultural relations**- Indira Gandhi Centre for Indian Culture in Mauritius is the India's largest cultural centre abroad.
- **Education**- Mauritius is one of the major beneficiaries of the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme.
- **Pan African e-Network Project**-It was inaugurated in 2009 connecting Mauritius and other African countries with India through a satellite and fibre-optic network for sharing India's expertise in education and health care.
- **Emergency assistance**- India has traditionally been the 'first responder' for Mauritius in times of crisis, including during the recent Covid-19 and Wakashio oil-spill crises.
- **Visa free regime**- Mauritian Government introduced a visa-free regime for Indian tourists for a period up to 90 days.]
- **Recent developments**- Both countries jointly inaugurated an airstrip and a jetty that India has built on Agaléga, a two-island Mauritian dependency 1,100 km to the north of Port Louis and 2,500 km southwest of Malé.

What is the significance of Agalega islands development for India?

- **Strengthens diplomatic relations-** The collaboration further enhances goodwill and trust between India and Mauritius.
- **Commitment to SAGAR-** The joint development underscores India's commitment to the vision of Security And Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR).
- **Maritime diplomacy**- It fosters India's willingness to assist smaller maritime nations in capacity-building and capability development, India will provide material and technical support to maritime security upon request.
- **Preferred partner in Indian Ocean region**- The project demonstrates that India is a benign and friendly country that respects the sovereignty of independent nations, hence Agalega islands will not serve as an Indian military base.

Mauritius stand	Maldives stand

• The recent infrastructure development is aimed at improving connectivity and bolstering security. • Agaléga's development is seen as a means to enhance monitoring, counter piracy, terrorism, and illegal activities, and strengthen security.	• **India Out campaign**- It was started in 2020 as on-ground protests in Maldives and later spread widely across social media platforms. • **Pro-China stance**- The newly elected government in Maldives is pro-China which is a threat to India's security. • Indian technical personnel are being sent to replace military personnel in the Maldives which is part of an agreement between the two countries.

- **Maritime security**- The presence of India on Agaléga Island will enhance monitoring of Mauritius' vast 2.3 million sq km Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
- **Counter china's presence**- China maintains embassies in each of the six islands in the Indian Ocean namely Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar, and Comoros.

In 2017, China opened its first overseas military facility in the Indian Ocean in Djibouti on the Horn of Africa.

What lies ahead?

- India will have to manage its diplomatic relationships while continuously pursuing its strategic interests in Indian Ocean region.
- India's infrastructure improvement in Mauritius, reflects its commitment to assist in the development goals of partner nations while respecting their sovereignty.

References

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2. Indian Express- India's vision for its maritime neighbourhood

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