The Indian Ocean – Cradle of a New Blue Economy

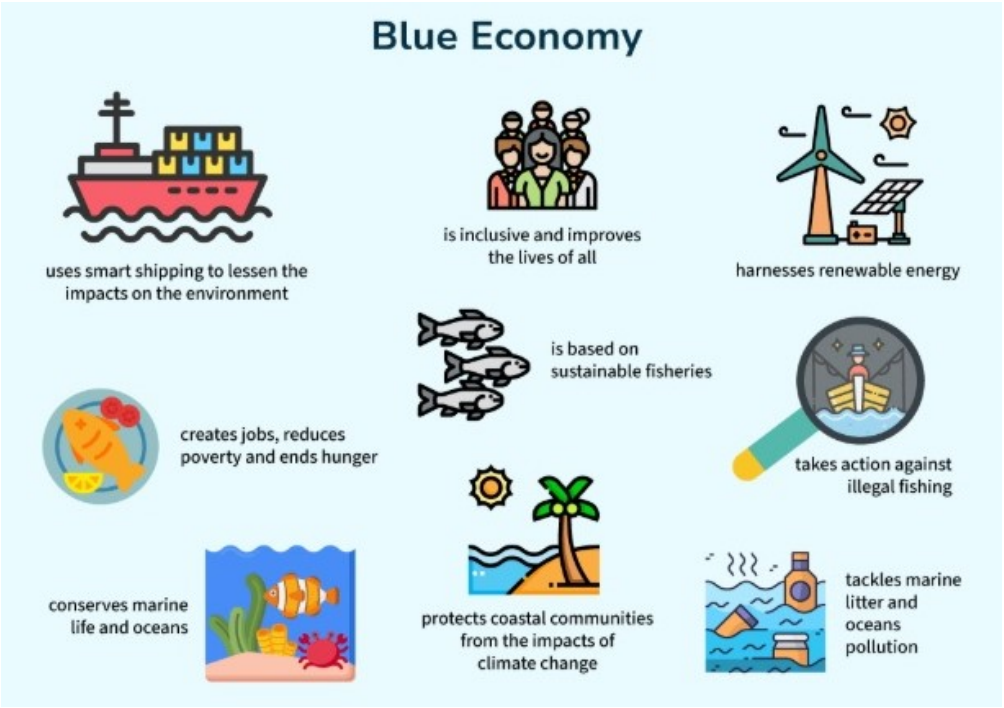
Mains: *GS III - Economy*

Why in News?

Today, as climate change, rising sea levels, and overfishing place unprecedented stress on marine ecosystems—especially in the highly vulnerable Indian Ocean—India again faces a historic responsibility.

What is blue economy?

- **Blue economy** – It sustainably uses ocean resources for economic growth, jobs, and livelihoods while protecting marine ecosystems, balancing exploitation with conservation.
- It involves innovation, smart governance (like marine spatial planning), and inclusive practices, recognizing oceans as engines for clean energy, coastal jobs, and climate defense, contrasting with traditional marine economies that often degrade the environment.



- **Key aspects & sectors**
  - **Fisheries & Aquaculture** – Sustainable fishing, green aquaculture, better supply chains.
  - **Marine Renewable Energy** – Offshore wind, tidal, thermal energy.

- **Shipping & Ports** – Efficient, green maritime transport, digital ports.
- **Tourism** – Sustainable coastal and marine tourism.
- **Biotechnology** – Utilizing marine biodiversity for pharmaceuticals.
- **Blue Carbon** – Protecting and restoring mangroves and seagrass for carbon sequestration.
- **Deep Sea Mining** – Exploring minerals responsibly.

What is the background of India's blue economy?

- **India's Stance** – When the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) was negotiated in the 1970s and early 1980s, India stood with the world's smallest and most vulnerable states.
- **Advocacy of India** – Alongside Pacific Island countries, India championed the principle that the seabed beyond national jurisdiction should be the "common heritage of mankind".
- It was a remarkable moment, because a large developing country aligning itself with island nations, not for advantage, but for fairness.
- **Nehru's Vision** – As early as the 1950s, Jawaharlal Nehru recognised the ocean's centrality to India's future, declaring: *"Whichever way we turn, we are drawn to the seas.*
- *"Our future security and prosperity are closely linked with the freedom and the resources of the oceans*."
- That foresight set the stage for India's enduring role as both a maritime nation and a maritime leader.
- **Present status** – Half a century later, the ocean faces pressures unimaginable at the time of UNCLOS. Climate change is heating and acidifying the seas, sea levels are rising, and illegal and unregulated fishing is stripping marine life from the water column.
- The Indian Ocean, home to one-third of humanity, is already one of the most climate-vulnerable basins on earth.
- India now has both the opportunity and the responsibility to play a historic leadership role once again.
- This time, the task is not to draft law, but to shape practice — ensuring that the Indian Ocean becomes not a theatre of rivalry, but a laboratory of sustainability, innovation, and resilience.

What should be done for a sustainable Blue Ocean?

- **3 pillars** – India's Blue Ocean Strategy should rest on three pillars: stewardship of the commons, resilience, and inclusive growth.
  - **Stewardship** – India must continue to assert that the Indian Ocean is a shared space, not a contested one.
  - By prioritising ecosystem restoration, biodiversity protection, and sustainable fisheries, India can set the tone for cooperative management, rather than competitive exploitation.
  - **Resilience** – As the climate crisis intensifies, ocean nations must focus on adaptation and preparedness.

    - India can lead by establishing a Regional Resilience and Ocean Innovation hub — one that strengthens ocean observation networks, improves early warning systems, and transfer technology to small island developing states and African coastal nations.
    - **Inclusive growth** – The Indian Ocean must become a driver of prosperity for all littoral states.
    - Green shipping, offshore renewable energy, sustainable aquaculture, and marine biotechnology offer pathways to development that are compatible with climate goals.
- **Sustained investment and coordinated regional action** – It is encouraging that the financial tide is beginning to turn.
    - **Blue Economy and Finance Forum (BEFF)** – It was held in Monaco, in June 2025, with governments, development banks and private investors.
    - They highlighted a €25 billion pipeline of existing ocean investments and announced €8.7 billion in new commitments, with near-parity between public and private sources.
    - **The Finance in Common Ocean Coalition –** By bringing together 20 public development banks, it announced annual pledges of $7.5 billion.
    - **The Development Bank of Latin America** – It doubled its blue economy target to $2.5 billion by 2030.
    - **Brazilian Presidency at COP30 in Belém** - The launched the One Ocean Partnership as part of the Belém Action Agenda, committing to mobilise $20 billion for ocean action by 2030.

What is the present strategy and concerns on Indian Ocean?

- **Present strategy** – Much of today's discourse on the Indian Ocean is framed in terms of "Indo-Pacific strategy", naval balance, freedom of navigation, and secure sea lanes.
- **Ecosystem collapse and climate disruption** – Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, coral reef degradation and intensifying storm surges erode livelihoods and undermine social stability.
- Addressing these threats requires a shift from traditional notions of maritime security toward security through sustainability.
- **SAGAR doctrine** – India's doctrine of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) articulated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Mauritius in 2015, offers an important anchor.
- The prime minister said *"We seek a future for the Indian Ocean that lives up to its name as a zone of peace, stability and prosperity,"* he said.

What is India's historic responsibility?

- **Stockholm Conference in 1972** – Prime Minister Indira Gandhi warned, we do not want to impoverish the environment any more than we want to impoverish our people.
- That insight remains strikingly relevant.
- **COP30 in Belem (2025) &the G-20 Summit in Johannesburg**-It recognised the importance of terrestrial and marine ecosystems for climate stability, sustainable development, and community resilience.

- Anchoring scaling up of finance and support for developing countries, aligning with the equity dimensions of ocean action.
- With the outcomes of the 3rd United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3) in Nice, COP30 in Belém, and the entry into force of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement, 2026 is shaping up to be a pivotal year for ocean governance.
- **Prospects for India** – India's readiness to ratify the BBNJ Agreement presents an opportunity to demonstrate how the Indian Ocean region can pioneer globally relevant solutions.
- From green shipping corridors and blue bonds to inclusive marine technology transfer and carefully governed ocean-based carbon dioxide removal.
- This agenda could also serve as a defining theme for India's chairmanship of the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

What India should do?

- **Financial routing** – India must seize this moment to channel global financing into regional priorities.
- An Indian Ocean Blue Fund, seeded by India and open to contributions from development banks, philanthropy, and the private sector, could provide the institutional architecture needed to turn pledges into projects.
- **Building leadership** – If India leads with ambition, humility, and inclusivity, the Indian Ocean can once again demonstrate what was evident during UNCLOS negotiations: that even in the most complex of arenas, cooperation can prevail over conflict, and solidarity over rivalry.
- **Coordination** – The Indian Navy and the Indian Coast Guard, working alongside civilian agencies, can deepen regional cooperation in maritime domain awareness, disaster response and ecosystem monitoring - aligning security objectives with environmental stewardship.
- **Choosing the right approach** – Not of rivalry, but of responsibility. Not of dominance, but of stewardship.
- As External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar has noted, India's approach to the Indian Ocean is "cooperative, consultative, and outcome-oriented," aimed at shared prosperity and stability.
- The guiding principle should be simple and resonant: "From the Indian Ocean, for the World."

What lies ahead?

- The Indian Ocean, the cradle of some of the world's oldest civilisations, can now become the cradle of a new blue economy, one that marries prosperity with sustainability, and resilience with justice.
- The challenge is clear: to move beyond rhetoric, to align vision with finance, and to build partnerships that endure.
- For the world, the message is urgent: the ocean is not a void to be filled or a frontier to be conquered. It is the foundation of life itself.

Reference

[The Hindu| Indian Ocean & Blue Economy]