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PAPER II

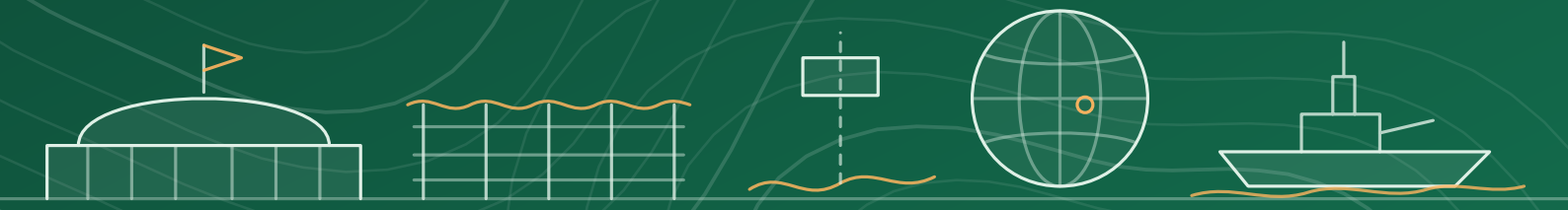
Political Aspects Notes

The complete Political Aspects section of Paper II — the geographical basis of federalism, state reorganisation and new states, regional consciousness, inter-state and international issues, and the geopolitics of South Asia and the Indian Ocean, with previous year questions.

Compiled by Arvind KrS

FEDERALISM | NEW STATES | BOUNDARIES | WATER DISPUTES | GEOPOLITICS

14	4	89	33
Chapters	Units	Previous year questions	Diagrams and figures



IN THIS BOOK

01 Federalism and the Making of States

02 Regional Consciousness and Inter-State Issues

03 International Boundaries and Security

04 India in World Affairs and Geopolitics

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Geography Optional — Political Aspects

Paper II · Geography of India: Political Aspects

Mains 2027 Edition · Compiled November 2026

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Questions or corrections: support@lotusarise.com

The outline map of India on the cover and on the chapter and unit pages is decorative and not to scale.

How to read these notes

Every chapter is marked against the questions UPSC has actually asked on it, so the points that matter most stand out on the first read and are quick to find at revision.

Federalism divides power between a centre and its constituent units.

Yellow marker: key point. A point that carries the ideas UPSC has asked about in this chapter. Read these first, and make sure each one is in your answer.

Federalism is a political institution in which the population of a geographical unit comes together for a certain political objective.

Blue marker: definition. The cleanest definition of a term, ready to open an answer with.

Its **geographical basis** is the set of physical, socio-cultural and economic forces.

Saffron underline: PYQ term. A key term or phrase that appears in this chapter's previous year questions.

Federalism and Its Geographical Basis

PYQ 2006 · 1996 · 1993

PYQ tag on a heading. The years in which UPSC asked about this section. Sections without a tag are background or linking material.

PYQ RADAR **5** questions Last asked **2019**

PYQ radar. At the start of each chapter: how many times the topic has been asked, and how recently. The contents page shows the same count for every chapter.

Suggested method. First read: the whole chapter. Revision: the yellow and blue marks, the tagged headings and the PYQ list at the end of the chapter. Last week before Mains: the PYQ list alone, answering each question in your head from the marked points.

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UNIT 01 | 4 CHAPTERS

Federalism and the Making of States



Geographical basis of Indian federalism; state reorganisation; emergence of new states.

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GEOGRAPHY OPTIONAL | PAPER II · POLITICAL ASPECTS

Geographical Basis of Indian Federalism



PYQ RADAR **7** questions Last asked **2019** 2019 ×2 · 2017 ×2 · 2006 · 1996 · 1993

CONTENTS

01 Federalism and Its Geographical Basis
02 Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces in India
03 Why Indian Federalism Has Lasted
04 Previous Year Questions

- **Federalism** divides power between a centre and its constituent units. Its **geographical basis** is the set of physical, socio-cultural and economic forces that make such a division both possible and necessary.
- **Geographical federalism** arises when the **centripetal (unifying) and centrifugal (diversifying) forces** within a country are in **balance**. It is the spatial expression of **unity in diversity**.
- India is the classic case: a **Union of 28 States and 8 Union Territories** since 26 January 2020, in a land held together by mountains, sea and monsoon but divided by relief, language and history.

01 Federalism and Its Geographical Basis

PYQ 2006 · 1996 · 1993

The Balance of Forces

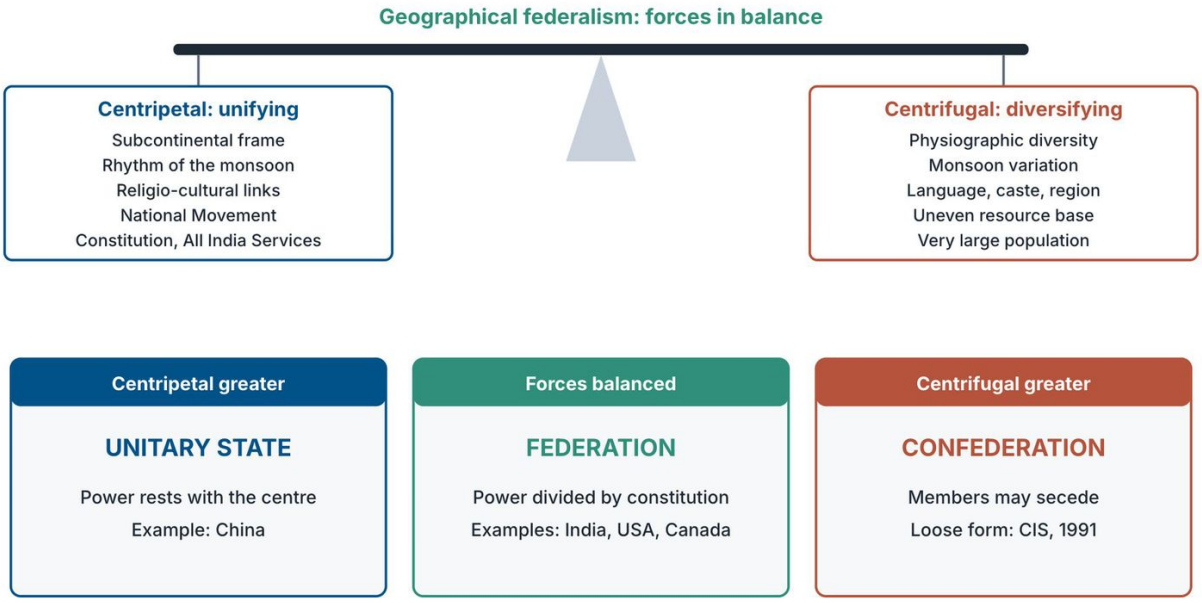
- **William S. Livingston (1952)** placed the essence of federalism in the **forces of society, economic, social, political and cultural**, and less in legal wording. A society is federal when its diversities are **grouped territorially**.
- The terms come from political geography. **Richard Hartshorne (1950)** read a working state through its **centripetal and centrifugal forces**.
- On this reading, the form of a state follows from the balance:

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POLITICAL ASPECTS · FEDERALISM

Forces and the Form of the State

The balance of unifying and diversifying forces decides whether a state tends to be unitary, federal or confederal.



Schematic. Forces are not measured quantities; the balance is a reading of tendencies. lotusarise.com

BALANCE OF FORCES	POLITICAL FORM	CHARACTER	EXAMPLE
Centripetal > centrifugal	**Unitary**	Power rests with the centre	China
Centripetal = centrifugal	**Federal**	Power is divided by the constitution	India, USA, Canada, Australia
Centripetal < centrifugal	**Confederation**	Member states keep the power to secede	CIS, as a loose association of former Soviet republics since 1991

- The **United Arab Emirates**, often listed with confederations, has been a **federation of seven emirates** under its constitution of 2 December 1971, though loosely bound in practice.
- **Geographical federation** means the **inherent and genetic causes**: the physiographic, socio-cultural and economic forces and processes that create a balance between unifying and diversifying forces.

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FEATURE	GEOGRAPHICAL FEDERALISM	POLITICAL FEDERALISM
Origin	Inherent forces and processes in the land and its people	**Superimposed by statutory provisions**
Direction of flow	**Bottom to top**	**Top to bottom**
Durability	Lasting, as it grows from the ground	Depends on continued agreement and law

What Federalism Means

- **Federalism** is a political institution in which the population of a geographical unit comes together for a **certain political objective**.
- It is a **system of government** in which powers are divided between the centre and constituent parts such as states or provinces.
  - It is an **institutional mechanism to accommodate two sets of politics**: one at the national level and one at the regional or provincial level.
- A federation is thus an **institutional form of political organisation**, and one of the two forms of political administration, the other being **unitary**.
- **Four criteria of political federalism:**
  - Supremacy of the constitution
  - Written constitution
  - Independent judiciary
  - Division and separation of power
- **Its further basis in practice:**
  - Two sets of governments
  - Rigid constitution
  - Bicameralism at the federal level, with one chamber representing the states
  - Separate agencies through which the federal government and federating units exercise their power
- **Federalism is needed** when a political area develops two kinds of politico-administrative objectives:
  - **Common objectives:** subjects of core national interest such as defence, currency and communication. These are the responsibility of the central government.
  - **Regional interests:** these are executed by provincial and local governments, within a hierarchy of central, provincial and local government.
- **In these terms**, centripetal forces resemble the common objectives and centrifugal forces resemble regional interests.
- **In India**, the **Seventh Schedule** gives this division a legal form through the **Union, State and Concurrent Lists**, which began with 97, 66 and 47 entries.
  - Article 1 calls India a **Union of States**.

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- Fifth and Sixth Schedules add special arrangements for tribal areas. The Sixth covers tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.
- The Inter-State Council (Article 263, set up in 1990), the five Zonal Councils (States Reorganisation Act, 1956) and the North Eastern Council (1971) are its forums for coordination.

02 Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces in India

POLITICAL ASPECTS · FEDERALISM

Geographical Basis of Indian Federalism: Summary

The topic in five steps, from the definition to why Indian federalism has survived.

1 Definition of federalism and federation

2 Basis of federalism

- Two sets of governments
- Separation of power
- Division of power
- Written constitution
- Rigid constitution
- Bicameralism

3 Objectives of federalism

i. Common (Central Government)
ii. Regional (State Government)

4 William S. Livingston's theorisation of federalism

Centripetal	Centrifugal
Sub-continental geographical region	Physiographic diversity
Rhythm of the monsoon	Monsoon variation
Linguistic unity and cultural identity	Diversity of population
Religio-cultural unity	Historical factors
Historical factors	British colonial rule
British colonial rule	Economic factors
National Movement	National Movement
Post-independence forces	Large size of population

5 Reasons for survival of Indian federalism

- Balance between centripetal and centrifugal forces
- Compromise between common and regional interests
- Cultivation of federal feelings

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Centripetal Forces

- **Sub-continental geographical region:** India's layout gives it a continental character.
  - Himalaya in the north.
  - Ocean on three sides in the south.
  - Rugged mountain terrain in the north-east.

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  - Desert in the west, and the lines of the **1947 Partition** in the west and east.
  - **George Goudie Chisholm** saw the **Indian subcontinent** as the clearest example anywhere of a region set apart by nature.
  - **George B. Cressey** also called India a subcontinent, a single unit holding many physical and cultural parts. Some Indian geographers object to the term as a colonial legacy, and some scholars prefer **South Asia**.
  - The Great Plains, lying between the Himalaya and the Peninsula, have a unifying role of their own.
- **Rhythm of the monsoon:** the monsoon binds India as one climatic region.
  - Its normal dates now run from onset over Keralam (Kerala) on 1 June, through cover of the whole country by 8 July, to withdrawal starting on 17 September and ending by 15 October. The older account gave 1 June to 15 September.
  - Rainfall bunched into a few months, and the farming tied to it, is an **all-India experience**.
  - **Its rhythm** has shaped songs, ragas, dance forms and music, a bond across the whole country.
- **Linguistic unity and cultural identity:**
  - Linguistic groups have **regional concentrations**, which became the basis of **linguistic States**. The **success of this arrangement** shows a hidden linguistic unity: language need not be a dividing line.
  - Indic culture: the culture related to India and the people living in it.
  - **Carl Ortwin Sauer's** cultural geography, in which culture works on the natural area to produce a cultural landscape, explains why a country's geography leads to **cultural regionalisation**.
  - English has emerged as a **link language**.
  - Devanagari is common to many northern languages, and the southern scripts descend, as Devanagari does, from Brahmi.
  - Hindustani has grown as a people's language, carried by Indian films and Indian Railways.
- **Religio-cultural unity:** there are hidden religious and cultural links across regions.
  - Coconut from Keralam is used in worship throughout India.
  - Rama and Ravana are both revered in different parts of the country.
  - Saint-poets preached the brotherhood of all people, and the Ramayana and Mahabharata give themes even to tribal dance and music.
  - Shared shrines draw devotees across faiths: Hindus visit dargahs and mosques, and Muslims visit temples.
  - Partition was argued on the **two-nation theory**, yet India kept a **very large Muslim population**, 17.22 crore or 14.23% in Census 2011, within a secular Constitution.
  - Federalism was adopted with **limited resistance**.
- **Historical factors:**
  - Major rulers aspired to rule India **from Kanniyakumari to Kashmir**.
  - The *Arthashastra* of **Chanakya** describes the **chakravartikshetra**, the realm from the **Himalaya to the sea**. A saying attributed to him sets the protection of **Aryavarta above that of a single janapada**. Both point to an old idea of the whole.
  - Bharat itself recalls King Bharata, whom tradition credits with seeing the country's underlying unity.
  - Invaders came for **India**, not for a single province.

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- **British colonial rule: administrative unification** gave a further boost to centralising forces.
- **National Movement:** the **most significant unifying force**. It brought people into contact, and the Indian National Congress served as a common platform.
- **Post-independence forces:**
  - Common defence and military organisation.
  - Trade, transport and communication, with a national home market: Assam tea, Punjab and Haryana wheat, Chotanagpur minerals and southern spices reach the whole country.
  - The Constitution of India, which imparts the feeling that India belongs to all Indians.
  - All India Services.

Centrifugal Forces

- **Physiographic diversity:** plains, plateaus, hills, coasts and deserts have produced **diverse cultural elements**.
  - In very large countries such as **Australia, Canada, India, the USA and the former USSR** (now Russia), the centre cannot look into the day-to-day economic affairs of every region. Healthy federalism becomes necessary.
- **Monsoon variation:** although the monsoon links the whole country, its **annual variability and its spatial and temporal variation in rainfall** have created regional diversity in **farming patterns, food habits and industrial regions**.
  - The range runs from Mawsynram in Meghalaya to Jaisalmer in the Thar.
- **Diversity of population:** Indian society holds many **sub-national, linguistic, regional and caste groups**, so regional feeling is strong.
  - **Regional governance** has a long history. The British recognised this geography and governed through Presidencies.
  - The **Government of India Act, 1935** laid the foundation of federalism in India.
  - Language: an older count gave **744 languages and dialects**, with **97% of the people speaking 14 languages**. **Census 2011** gives **121 languages**, of which the **22 scheduled languages** are the mother tongue of **96.71%**.
  - Religion: India has the world's largest populations of Hindus, Sikhs and Parsis, and the **third-largest Muslim population**.
- **Historical factors:** kings enjoyed **regional autonomy**, and needed only to pay revenue to the ruler at the centre.
- **British colonial rule: princely states** were recognised, 562 of them beside nine British provinces at independence, and **zamindars** functioned independently under the zamindari system.
- **Economic factors:** the uneven **natural resource base** calls for a strong federal structure to distribute resources fairly.
  - Mineral-bearing States won a major ruling on **25 July 2024**, when a nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court upheld, 8 to 1, their power to tax mineral rights.
- **National Movement:** the British policy of **divide and rule**, and the regard shown to princely states and zamindars, made these groups act as **safety valves** for colonial rule.

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- **Large size of population:** India had **17.5% of the world's people** at Census 2011, against the 17% often quoted.
  - Uttar Pradesh alone had 19.98 crore. Only four countries then had more, counting India itself: China, India, the USA and Indonesia.
  - Even provincial governments thus serve very large populations.

The Himalaya: Both Forces at Once

- **As a unifying frontier:** the Himalaya shields the north, feeds the great rivers and carries a shared pilgrim geography. The war of 1962 showed, however, that it is **no complete defence barrier**.
- **As a diversifying belt:** deep valleys and isolation have kept **distinct hill identities**, and regional disparity between hills and plains has fed **separatist sentiment** in peripheral hill areas, above all in the north-east.
- **In federal terms:** several Himalayan units are products of this geography, from **hill States** such as Uttarakhand to the Union Territory of Ladakh.

03 Why Indian Federalism Has Lasted

PYQ 2019 · 2006

Comparison and Accommodation

- **Centripetal factors** let Indian federalism emerge and survive. After the Second World War, several federal states broke up: Yugoslavia, the USSR and Czechoslovakia.
  - Indonesia, a unitary state, faced serious pressures: Timor-Leste became independent in 2002, and the Aceh conflict ended in a peace agreement in 2005.
- In India, regional forces have mostly sought **regional demands within the Union**, and many have been met by negotiation.
  - **Punjab:** the accord of 1985 addressed basic demands of the Punjabi people during the **Khalistan** movement, and violence there subsided in the following decade.

REGION	SETTLEMENT	DATE	LATER POSITION
Punjab	**Rajiv–Longowal Accord**	24 July 1985	Met many demands of the agitation; Chandigarh's transfer, agreed in it, not carried out
Mizoram	**Mizoram Peace Accord** with Laldenga's Mizo National Front	30 June 1986	Statehood on 20 February 1987
Assam	**Assam Accord**	15 August 1985	Ended the agitation begun in 1979
Darjeeling	Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council; then **Gorkhaland Territorial Administration**	1988; 18 July 2011	Administrative and financial powers, none legislative; the statehood demand continues

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REGION	SETTLEMENT	DATE	LATER POSITION
Ladakh	Autonomous hill councils; then **Union Territory**	1990s–2003; 31 October 2019	Talks on statehood and the Sixth Schedule stood deadlocked in October 2026
New States	Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand; Telangana	2000; 2014	Meets demands inside the Union

- Jammu and Kashmir became a Union Territory on 31 October 2019. In its judgment of 11 December 2023, the Supreme Court upheld the end of special status and recorded the Union's assurance on **restoring statehood**, a demand still pressed in 2026.
- **Fiscal federalism** is a further test.
  - GST began on **1 July 2017** under the 101st Amendment, with a GST Council under Article 279A. States' revenue was protected for five years, to **30 June 2022**.
  - The Sixteenth Finance Commission, whose report was tabled on 1 February 2026, kept the **States' share at 41%** for 2026–31 and added a State's **contribution to GDP** as a criterion.
- **Representation** is another. Lok Sabha seat numbers are frozen until the first census after 2026.
  - The **Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill** of April 2026, which would have raised the House to 850 seats, was **defeated on 17 April 2026** by 298 to 230, short of two-thirds.
  - The next count, Census 2027, has the reference date of 1 March 2027, with 1 October 2026 for Ladakh and snow-bound areas.

What the Balance Requires

- A federation is a **compromise between common and regional interests**, so the federal government holds the key to its success.
  - The centre should be **neither too rigid nor too flexible** towards regional demands. Either extreme endangers the system.
- It must **cultivate federal feeling** and gradually reduce extreme regionalism and divisive sentiment.
  - **Genuine demands** should be met promptly, which eases regional feeling.
  - **Demands without a genuine basis** are to be discouraged and contained, within the law where they turn violent.
  - India's record in meeting these needs helps explain the survival of its federalism.
- **Under-development and economic disparity** can be reduced substantially in a federal structure, because governments of backward areas can **frame and carry out their own regional plans**.
- **Size matters:** small states with a long historical past are largely **ethnically based**, and generally have **unitary** governments. Countries with **large areas and populations**, and many ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups, are better governed through a **federal government**.
- **In sum:** the physical, cultural, social and historical factors above show that geography has played a **vital role in forming regional units with distinct identities**, and has thereby helped the cause of Indian federalism.

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GST and Developed and Backward States PYQ 2017

- **Change:** Goods and Services Tax (1 July 2017) is taxed where goods are **consumed**, not where they are made.
- **Effect on consuming States:** populous States with less industry, such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, were expected to gain from a larger tax base.
- **Effect on producing States:** industrial States such as Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Maharashtra gave up origin-based tax, so they were promised **compensation for five years**, up to June 2022, at 14% growth.
- **Backward and hill States:** they lost the power to attract industry through local tax breaks, and low formal activity limits their gains.
- **Federal effect:** the **GST Council** pools tax powers of the Centre and States, which reduces fiscal autonomy but creates one market.

Previous Year Questions

2019	Discuss the political aspects of the Himalaya. Explain how it has affected geo-strategy, geo-politics and regional consciousness of Indian federalism.
2017	Goods and Services Tax (GST) has a differential impact on developed and backward States of the country. How and why?
2006	Examine the geographical basis of Indian federalism.
1996	Write short note: Geographical basis of the Indian Federation.
1993	Examine critically the geographical basis of the Indian federation.
2017	Goods and Services Tax (GST) has differential impact on developed and backward states of the country. How and why?
2019	Discuss the political aspects of Himalaya. Explain how it has affected geo-strategy, geo-politics and regional consciousness of Indian federalism.

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UNIT 04 | 5 CHAPTERS

India in World Affairs and Geopolitics



India's role in world affairs; geopolitics of South Asia and the Indian Ocean realm.

CHAPTERS

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GEOGRAPHY OPTIONAL | PAPER II · POLITICAL ASPECTS

Geopolitics of the Indian Ocean and South Asia



PYQ RADAR **18** questions Last asked **2026**

2026 · 2024 · 2023 ×3 · 2021 · 2019 · 2018 · 2016 · 2014 ×2 · 2013 · 2008 · 2003 · 2000 · 1998 · 1995 · 1987

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01 The Indian Ocean and India
02 The Ocean Since 2015
03 South Asia
04 Previous Year Questions

- **Geopolitics** is the shaping of **political strategy from geographical facts** such as location, routes, resources and terrain, in order to win **special political or economic advantage**. It belongs to the wider field of **political geography**.
- **South Asia and the Indian Ocean realm** have gained geopolitical weight because of their **strategic location**.
  - The ocean joins Africa, West Asia, South Asia, South-East Asia and Australia, and carries the energy and trade of distant economies.
  - South Asia sits at the head of that ocean, with **India at its centre** by land and by sea.

01 The Indian Ocean and India

PYQ 2026 · 2019 · 2018 +8

India's Stake in the Ocean

- **Position:** India has a **long coastline** on the ocean and the **largest population and economy** among the states resident on its shores. Together these give it a leading place in the region.
  - **Coast:** long given as 7,516.6 km, and re-assessed in 2025 at **11,098.81 km**.
  - **Economy:** India's GDP for 2026 is about US$ 4.06 trillion against Australia's US$ 2.11 trillion (IMF, October 2026). Australia, however, is larger by area.

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- **Peace and resources:** India's concern, past and present, is to keep the ocean peaceful, to **prevent unauthorised incursions**, and to protect its **mineral resources from exploitation** by other countries.
  - **Maritime zones:** a territorial sea of 12 nautical miles and an exclusive economic zone of 200 nautical miles under the Act of 1976, within the **Law of the Sea Convention**.
  - **Deep seabed:** India was the first registered **pioneer investor (1987)**. An early allotment of 1,50,000 sq km has since narrowed to a contract for **75,000 sq km** of the Central Indian Ocean Basin.
  - **Sulphides:** the **International Seabed Authority** contracts cover 10,000 sq km on the Central and Southwest Indian ridges (2016) and 10,000 sq km on the **Carlsberg Ridge**, signed on 15 September 2025.
- **China's navy:** the **growing naval ambitions of China** and its rising presence at overseas bases and ports pose a **military challenge** to India.
- **Nuclear neighbours: Pakistan and China** both hold nuclear weapons, which has pressed India towards a sophisticated nuclear defence system and a **second-strike capability**.
  - **Doctrine:** under its **no-first-use policy**, India's deterrent rests on surviving a first strike. Ballistic missile submarines provide the sea-based leg of that deterrent.
  - **Fleet:** INS Arihant (2016), INS Arighaat (August 2024) and **INS Aridhaman**, commissioned at Visakhapatnam on 3 April 2026.
- **Oil and gas:** India's growing reliance on **West Asian energy** gives it a direct interest in **peace and stability** there. **Crude import dependence** stood at 88.7% in 2025-26.

Three Sets of Factors

- The geographical and political causes behind the ocean's importance fall under **three heads**:
  - The **strategic location** of the Indian Ocean.
  - The **dynamics of the Cold War**.
  - **Concerns of the post-Cold War era**.

Strategic Location PYQ 2014

- **Size and name:** the **third largest ocean**, about **70.6 million sq km**, against an older figure of about 73.4 million sq km. It is the only ocean named after a country.
- **Limits:** Asia closes it in the north, so it is **land-locked on that side**. Its conventional limits with the Atlantic and Pacific run along 20°E from Cape Agulhas and about 147°E from Tasmania. A forked **mid-ocean ridge system** divides its floor.
- **Meeting of three oceans:** it joins the Atlantic and the Pacific in the south, and many coastal states line its shores.
  - **46 countries** surround it on the United Nations count usually quoted: **27 littoral (including Australia), 12 landlocked and 7 island states**.
  - It acts as a **bridge between east and west**, linking Europe with Asia, Asia with North America and Asia with Africa.

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- **Antarctica:** the ocean reaches south to the Antarctic coast, and the continent was long seen as an untapped store of future opportunity.
  - The **Madrid Protocol**, signed on 4 October 1991 and in force since 14 January 1998, bans mineral activity there except for science. A review becomes possible from 2048.
  - India's interest is so far scientific, through its **Maitri and Bharati** stations.
- **Persian Gulf:** the ocean's nearness to this hydrocarbon-rich basin adds to its geopolitical value.
- **Narrow gates:** the ocean is entered mainly through **narrow passages**, each a potential **choke-point**. **Bab-el-Mandeb and Hormuz** lie in the west, and **Malacca** lies in the east.

GATE	JOINS OR LIES BETWEEN	GEOPOLITICAL WEIGHT
Strait of Hormuz	Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman	Gulf oil and gas; India's crude and LPG
Bab-el-Mandeb	Red Sea and Gulf of Aden	Route to Suez, open since 1869, and Europe
Strait of Malacca	Andaman Sea and South China Sea	East Asian trade and oil; close to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands
Sunda and Lombok	Java Sea and Indian Ocean	Alternatives to Malacca through Indonesia
Mozambique Channel	Africa and Madagascar	Route round southern Africa
Cape of Good Hope	Indian and Atlantic oceans	The only western link before 1869; again in use during Red Sea attacks

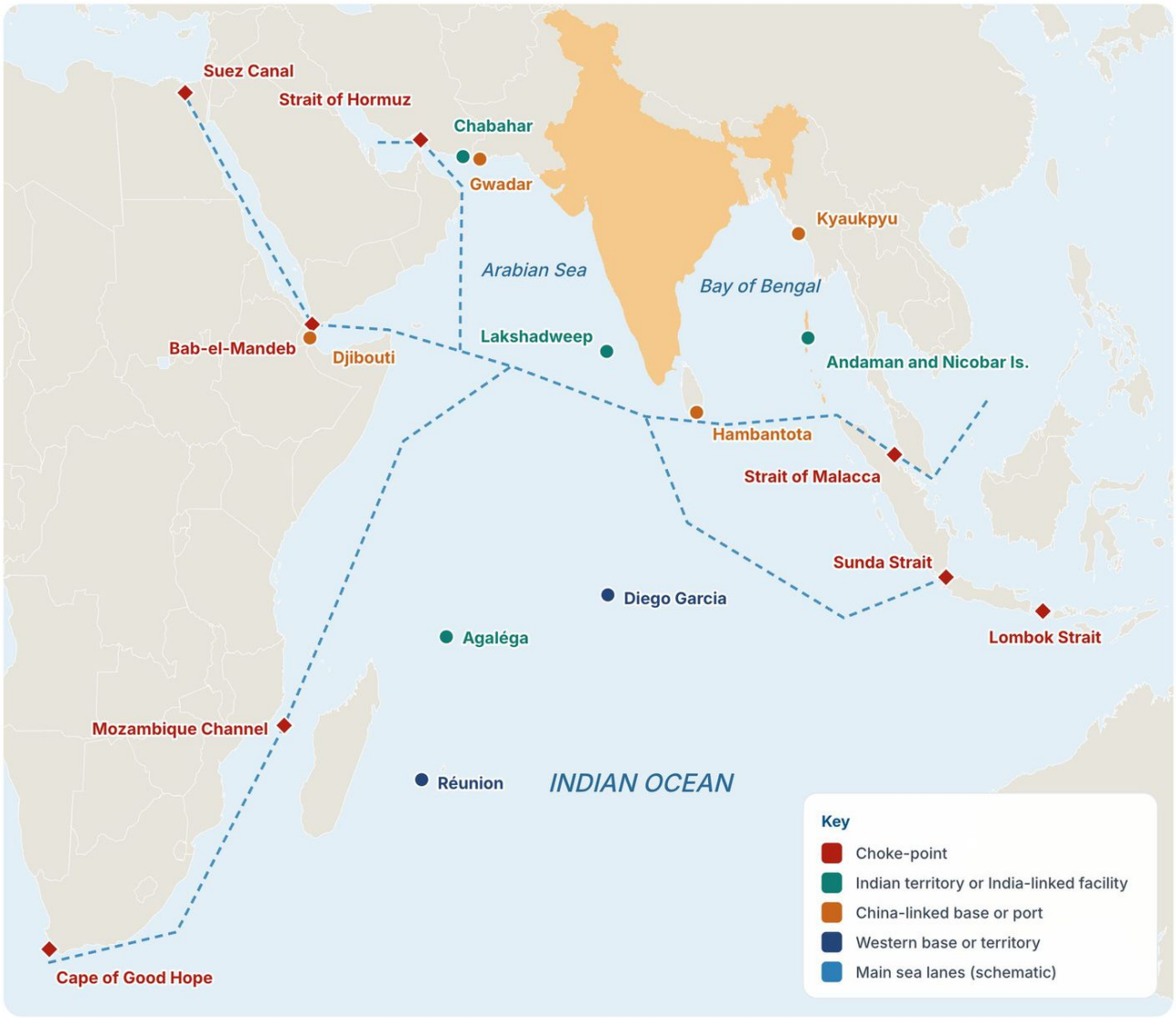
- **India at the head of the ocean:** its peninsula reaches about 1,600 km into the water and parts it into the **Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal**.
  - East-west sea lanes run **close to its shores**, and many air routes between Europe and East Asia cross it.
  - About **95% by volume and 70% by value** of India's trade moves by sea (2026).
  - That central place once made India the great entrepôt of ocean trade, which drew West Asian and European traders to it.

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POLITICAL ASPECTS · INDIAN OCEAN

Choke-Points and Strategic Places of the Indian Ocean

The ocean is entered through a few narrow gates, and the main powers hold places along the lanes between them.



Schematic: sea lanes are generalised. Places located from published coordinates. Boundaries of India: Survey of India outline.

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- **Resources:** the wealth of the ocean floor and its rim is itself a source of rivalry.

RESOURCE	WHAT IT IS	WHERE
Aggregates	Sand, gravel and shell, for construction and cement	Continental shelves
Placers	Heavy minerals concentrated by erosion: titanium, tin, thorium-bearing monazite	Sri Lanka, India, Australia, Malaysia, Indonesia

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RESOURCE	WHAT IT IS	WHERE
Polymetallic nodules	Manganese, copper, nickel and cobalt	Deep basins, notably the Central Indian Ocean Basin
Phosphorite	Phosphate for fertiliser, on margins and upper slopes	Arabian coast, east coast of India, Andamans, south of Sri Lanka, Agulhas Bank
Oil and gas	Offshore fields on the shelves	Persian Gulf, Mumbai High, Krishna-Godavari, Indonesia, Malaysia, Western Australia

Sea Power in History

- **Early Indian links:** Mauryan ports worked the Bay of Bengal, Kautilya's Arthashastra provides for sea affairs, and the **Cholas** built a naval power. The Sumatran empire of **Srivijaya** traded closely with South India between the 8th and 11th centuries.
- **Arabs and Europeans:** Arab traders dominated the Arabian Sea before **Vasco da Gama reached Calicut in 1498**. European rivalry followed, and **Britain won supremacy**, developing Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai as ports.
- **Kavalam Madhava Panikkar (1945)** drew the lesson that **whoever commands the sea will in time command the land beside it**.
  - Earlier conquerors who came by land were absorbed into India. The British stayed apart because **naval supply lines** tied them to home.
  - Japan's seizure of Singapore and the Andamans in 1942 pointed the same way.
  - The argument echoes the **sea power thesis of Alfred Thayer Mahan**.
- **The vacuum:** decolonisation shrank British power, and in **January 1968** London announced its withdrawal from east of Suez. The rivalry that followed filled the space.

Cold War Dynamics

- **First phase: ideology and bases.** Geopolitics in the realm began with the division of the world into camps of **capitalism and communism**.
  - The **USA and the USSR** overshadowed colonial powers such as Britain, France and the Netherlands in South Asia and the Indian Ocean.
  - **Diego Garcia:** Britain carved out the **British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)** from Mauritius and Seychelles on 8 November 1965, and made it available to the USA under an **agreement of 30 December 1966**. The USA built a full **naval and air base**, to guard West Asian oil and serve its Cold War defence.
  - Each superpower sought as many bases as it could in West Asia and north-eastern Africa, to deny the other strategic and military superiority.
  - **Soviet ships** first toured the ocean in March 1968, and work on a Soviet support facility at Berbera in Somalia began in October 1972.
- **Second phase: new weapons. Submarine-launched ballistic missiles** changed the calculation, and from the **1960s** both powers acquired naval and air bases to fit a global defence strategy built on them.

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- **Zone of Peace:** rising superpower rivalry produced the idea of keeping the ocean free of great-power contest.
  - The **Non-Aligned summit at Lusaka (1970)** called for it. **Sri Lanka** proposed it at the **United Nations General Assembly**, which adopted **Resolution 2832 on 16 December 1971** by 61 votes to none, with 55 abstentions.
  - An Ad Hoc Committee followed in 1972, and the item remains on the Assembly's agenda, most recently in Resolution 80/13 (2025).
  - The **superpowers stood aside**. They also wanted the coastal states to accept the zone's conditions, which would have made it harder for countries such as India to develop **nuclear weapons and advanced missiles**.
  - Some littoral states withheld support, fearing that **India would rise to dominance** once the outside powers had left.
- **Third phase: China. China's growing military and economic strength**, especially in the **1980s**, worried South-East Asian states, which wanted a continuing **US presence**.
  - **ASEAN** itself dates from **8 August 1967**. Its Bangkok Declaration names economic growth, social progress, cultural development and regional peace as aims, and it took shape amid Cold War fears of communist expansion.
- **Net effect:** Cold War rivalry and **Middle Eastern oil security** were the two foundations of the ocean's geopolitics in this era.

Post-Cold War Concerns

- **Thaw:** easing relations between the **USA and the USSR** reshaped the realm.
  - The **Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty** was signed on 8 December 1987, and **START I** on 31 July 1991.
  - The Cold War wound down by about **1990**, and the **USSR broke up in 1991**.
- Three factors then rose to the front:
  - **China's military posture** in the **Taiwan Strait and the Spratly Islands** alarms South-East Asian states and also the Korean peninsula and Japan. These countries press for a US presence to balance Chinese power.
  - **Energy security** of the West, and of industrial economies such as **Japan**, requires peace in the **Persian Gulf** and around it.
    - The **Carter Doctrine** of January 1980 declared the Gulf a vital US interest. It led to the **Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force** (1 March 1980), a versatile force able to step directly into a Gulf crisis, and to **Central Command** (1 January 1983).
    - The **Gulf War** of 1990-91 made the ocean a focus of world politics.
  - **International terrorist groups** active in the region bordering **Afghanistan and Pakistan** have added to the strategic importance of the ocean.

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02 The Ocean Since 2015

PYQ 2026 · 2019 · 2018 +8

India's Policy and Forums

- India's **Indian Ocean policy** combines regional cooperation with a growing security presence.

COOPERATIVE INSTRUMENTS	DATE	CONTENT
SAGAR	12 March 2015, Mauritius	Security and Growth for All in the Region
Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative	November 2019, Bangkok	Voluntary, non-treaty maritime cooperation
MAHASAGAR	March 2025, Mauritius	Wider vision: trade, development and security across regions
Indian Ocean Rim Association	India in the chair from November 2025	23 member states, 12 dialogue partners (2025)
Indian Ocean Naval Symposium	India in the chair from 20 February 2026	Navies of the region; India first chaired it in 2008
Colombo Security Conclave	Charter signed 30 August 2024	India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius; Bangladesh and Seychelles also attend
Bay of Bengal award	7 July 2014	Tribunal gave Bangladesh 19,467 of 25,602 sq km; India respected the verdict

SECURITY INSTRUMENTS	DATE	CONTENT
Operation Cactus	November 1988	Coup attempt in the Maldives reversed at that government's request
Andaman and Nicobar Command	2001	India's tri-service command at the Malacca approach
Agaléga	29 February 2024	India-funded airstrip and jetty in Mauritius; Mauritius denies it is a base
Sea-based deterrent	2016 to 2026	Three ballistic missile submarines
Operation Urja Suraksha	From March 2026	Warships escorting India-bound energy ships east of Hormuz

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Indian Islands

- **Andaman and Nicobar Islands:** they run close to the western mouth of the **Strait of Malacca**. **Sri Vijaya Puram**, once Port Blair, is the administrative centre.
  - **Great Nicobar:** the Galathea Bay transshipment port, airport, power plant and township plan is valued at roughly ₹80,000–92,000 crore. The National Green Tribunal declined to interfere with its environmental clearance in **February 2026**. A challenge to its forest clearance was pending before the Calcutta High Court in late 2026.
- **Lakshadweep:** it lies across the Arabian Sea lanes, where the Eight and Nine Degree Channels pass.
- Together these **island groups** extend India's exclusive economic zone and its watch over shipping.

China in the Ocean

- **"Far sea defence":** China has a Pacific coast only, yet its oil crosses this ocean, and its navy now plans to protect that route from the Gulf to Malacca.
- The label **"String of Pearls"** is used for the following chain of ports and bases:

PLACE	COUNTRY	ARRANGEMENT
Djibouti	Djibouti	China's first overseas military support base, opened 1 August 2017
Hambantota	Sri Lanka	70% stake and 99-year lease to China Merchants, signed July 2017, handed over December 2017
Gwadar	Pakistan	40-year operating concession to China Overseas Ports Holding (2017)
Kyaukpyu	Myanmar	Chinese-backed port plan on the Bay of Bengal
Chattogram (Chittagong)	Bangladesh	Named among China's early port interests

- **Research ships:** Sri Lanka barred foreign research vessels for a year from **January 2024**, amid Indian concern over Chinese ships.

Open Questions in 2026

- **Hormuz crisis:** the USA and Israel attacked Iran on **28 February 2026**, and Iran effectively shut the strait, which carried about a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas.
  - **India:** about 40% of its crude used this route, and its LPG depended on it far more. Indian warships escorted tankers in the Gulf of Oman from March 2026.
  - **Talks:** a US-Iran memorandum at Islamabad in mid-June 2026 promised reopening. Its 60-day window ended on **17 August 2026** without a settlement.
  - **Latest:** the UK Maritime Trade Operations centre logged 18 reports of attacks on ships in the strait and nearby waters by mid-October 2026.

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- **Chagos and Diego Garcia:** the **International Court of Justice** advised on **25 February 2019** that Britain should end its administration, and the General Assembly endorsed this in Resolution 73/295.
  - A **UK-Mauritius treaty of 22 May 2025** recognises Mauritian sovereignty and leases Diego Garcia back for 99 years. India welcomed it.
  - In **April 2026** the UK shelved ratification, after US opposition and without the exchange of notes it needs from Washington. Mauritius has spoken of legal action.
- **Chabahar:** India signed a **10-year contract** on 13 May 2024 for this Iranian port, its route to Afghanistan and Central Asia that avoids Pakistan.
  - The USA revoked its sanctions waiver from 29 September 2025, then granted India six months to **26 April 2026**, when the waiver lapsed.
  - In April 2026 reports spoke of India transferring its operating stake to an Iranian entity, with no deal yet reached.
- **Maldives:** relations cooled after **Mohamed Muizzu** took office in November 2023. The last Indian military personnel left by 10 May 2024.
  - They recovered with an aid package of about US$ 757 million in 2024 and Narendra Modi's visit of **25–26 July 2025**.

03 South Asia PYQ 2016

The Region and Its Terrain

- **Extent:** Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, with Afghanistan usually added. India alone holds about **three-fourths of the subcontinent's area**.
- **India's centrality:** India touches every other South Asian state by land or sea, and apart from Pakistan and Afghanistan **no two of the others share a land border**.
  - The border with Afghanistan, **106 km** on the Ministry of Home Affairs figure, lies in Ladakh, in the area under Pakistan's occupation.
- **Terrain shapes influence:**
  - **Himalaya:** a wall to the north that limits contact with Tibet. The crossing of it in 1962 ended the belief that it was a sufficient defence.
  - **Nepal and Bhutan:** landlocked, opening south towards the Indian plains, and so tied to India for transit. About 80% of Bhutan's trade is with India.
  - **Bangladesh:** almost enclosed by India on land. The narrow **Siliguri corridor** links India's North-East with the rest of the country.
  - **North-west:** open plains and desert along the 1947 line, with the old passes beyond it.
  - **Sri Lanka and the Maldives:** reached by sea, with India the nearest large neighbour across the **Palk Strait** and the **Eight Degree Channel**.
  - **Tibet:** the buffer disappeared when India recognised Chinese rule there in 1954, which brought the two powers face to face.

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India and Its Neighbours

- **Neighbourhood First** frames India's policy, and **relations with each neighbour** carry their own record. **Boundary disputes** and **shared rivers** run through most of them.

NEIGHBOUR	GEOGRAPHIC TIE	LATEST DATED POSITION
Pakistan	Plains and desert along the 1947 line; the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir	Pahalgam attack 22 April 2025; Indus Waters Treaty held in abeyance from 23 April 2025; Operation Sindoor 7 May; hostilities stopped 10 May; treaty still in abeyance, May 2026
Afghanistan	Landlocked; reached through Chabahar	India's technical mission in Kabul upgraded to an embassy, 10 October 2025
Nepal	Open border; transit through India	Balendra Shah sworn in as Prime Minister 27 March 2026, after polls of 5 March
Bhutan	Buffer on the Himalaya; 1949 treaty, revised 2007	First rail links announced 29 September 2025: Kokrajhar–Gelephu and Banarhat–Samtse
Bangladesh	Longest land border; Ganga–Brahmaputra delta	Sheikh Hasina left for India 5 August 2024; Tarique Rahman sworn in 17 February 2026; a visit reported for August 2026 was put off
Sri Lanka	Palk Strait; Hambantota and Trincomalee	First defence pact, April 2025; UAE–India–Sri Lanka energy hub plan for Trincomalee
Maldives	Sea lanes along the Eight Degree Channel	Modi's visit July 2025
Myanmar	Hill border; land bridge to South-East Asia	Kaladan route, Sittwe port to Mizoram, as an alternative to the Siliguri corridor

- **Past interventions:** the Indian Peace Keeping Force served in **Sri Lanka from 1987 to 1990**, and Indian paratroops reversed the **Maldives coup attempt of 1988**.
- **China in the region:** it has built road and rail links across its borderlands, and the **Karakoram Highway** runs through **Pakistan-occupied Kashmir**, which India objects to, as does a planned Kashgar–Gwadar rail link.
  - A first **China-Pakistan-Bangladesh** meeting took place at Kunming on 19 June 2025. Dhaka said it formed no alliance.
- **India's wider role in world affairs** rests in part on this regional base.

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Regional Bodies

BODY	FOUNDED	MEMBERS	LATEST POSITION
SAARC	8 December 1985, Dhaka	8, with Afghanistan from 2007	No summit since Kathmandu (2014); Islamabad 2016 postponed after India withdrew; "on pause" in India's description
BIMSTEC	6 June 1997, Bangkok	7, joining South and South-East Asia, without Pakistan or Afghanistan	Charter in force 20 May 2024; sixth summit at Bangkok, April 2025
SASEC	Sub-regional programme	Eastern South Asian states and others	Project-based connectivity and trade

Geopolitics of the North-East

- **Position:** about **98%** of the region's boundary is international, touching China, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh.
- **Siliguri Corridor:** a strip about **22 km** wide at its narrowest links the region with the rest of India, so it is a strategic weak point, as the Doklam stand-off of 2017 showed.
- **China:** it claims much of Arunachal Pradesh.
- **Myanmar and Bangladesh:** insurgent camps, refugee flows after 2021, and migration raise sensitive issues. In 2024 India announced an end to the free movement regime with Myanmar.
- **Act East:** the Kaladan project and the trilateral highway make the region India's gateway to Southeast Asia.

India and Sri Lanka PYQ 2023

- **Geography:** the shallow **Palk Strait and Adam's Bridge** separate the two countries by only about 30 km.
- **Issues:** the Tamil question, the Accord and peacekeeping force of 1987, and disputes over fishing and **Katchatheevu** (ceded 1974).
- **China:** the 99-year lease of **Hambantota port (2017)** raised concern about Chinese presence near Indian sea lanes.
- **Economic ties:** India gave about US$4 billion of support in the crisis of 2022, and Colombo handles much Indian transhipment cargo.
- **Strategic value:** Sri Lanka lies by the main east–west shipping route, so stable ties matter for India's Indian Ocean role.

Previous Year Questions

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2026	"India's approach to the Indian Ocean is cooperative rather than coercive." Critically examine the statement.
2023	Examine the geostrategic significance of Indian islands.
2023	Examine the geopolitical impact of the bilateral relationship between India and Sri Lanka.
2021	Discuss the geopolitical impact of the bilateral relationship between India and Bhutan.
2019	"India is emerging as a global power in relation to the Indian Ocean realm." Elaborate.
2018	Discuss the emerging geo-political scenario of the Indian Ocean realm.
2016	Explain the role of India in the geopolitics of South Asia.
2014	Discuss the implications of India's strategic location with reference to the Indian Ocean.
2014	Bring out the role of terrain in determining India's political influence over neighbouring countries.
2013	Write a note on geopolitics of the Indian Ocean realm.
2008	Assess the geopolitical significance of Indian Ocean.
2003	Make an appraisal of the role of India in the geopolitics of the Indian Ocean.
2000	Analyse the role of India in the geo-politics of the Indian Ocean Region.
1998	Discuss the geopolitical importance of Indian Ocean area.
1995	Write short note: Importance of India in the geopolitics of the Indian Ocean realm.
1987	Write short note: Geopolitical significance of the Indian Ocean.
2024	North-Eastern States in India are geopolitically sensitive and strategically significant. Explain.
2023	Examine the geopolitical impact of bilateral relationship between India and Sri Lanka.

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