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India–Mauritius Relations: Strategic Partnership, Maritime Cooperation and India’s Vision in the Indian Ocean Region

Published On: 01-07-2026

Recent Developments:

- **Prime Minister of India** met **Mauritian Prime Minister Dr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam** in **Victoria, Mahé**, on the sidelines of **Seychelles' Golden Jubilee National Day** celebrations.
- **Both leaders reviewed the progress of the India–Mauritius Enhanced Strategic Partnership**, reaffirmed cooperation under **Vision MAHASAGAR** and the **Neighbourhood First Policy**, and emphasized healthcare, connectivity, sustainable development, the blue economy, maritime security and peace in the Indian Ocean Region.

Overview of India–Mauritius Relations:

- **India and Mauritius share one of the closest bilateral partnerships**, founded on **shared historical links, civilizational ties, a large Indian diaspora, democratic values and maritime convergence**.
- **Mauritius occupies a pivotal position in India's Indian Ocean strategy**, supporting the objectives of **Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)**, **Vision MAHASAGAR**, the **Neighbourhood First Policy** and the **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)**.
- **The relationship extends beyond diplomacy**, encompassing **security, development, trade, education, culture, digital cooperation and multilateral engagement**.

Historical Background:

- **Mauritius remained uninhabited until European colonial settlement**, after which it successively came under Dutch, French and British rule.
- **Following the abolition of slavery in 1834**, a large number of Indians migrated to Mauritius as **indentured labourers**, laying the foundation for enduring people-to-people ties.
- **Nearly two-thirds of the Mauritian population is of Indian origin**, making the diaspora the strongest social pillar of bilateral relations.
- **India established diplomatic relations with Mauritius immediately after its independence in 1968**, reflecting the importance attached to the island nation.

Republic of Mauritius:

- **Mauritius is an island country in the south-western Indian Ocean**, located nearly **2,000 km southeast of the African mainland**.
- **Capital: Port Louis**.
- **Mauritius forms part of the Mascarene Islands**, along with **Réunion** and **Rodrigues**, giving it significant maritime importance in the western Indian Ocean.
- **Its location near major Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs)** enhances its strategic relevance for regional maritime security.

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Plot A P.127, AF block, 6 th street, 11th Main Rd, Shanthy Colony, Anna Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600040

Phone: **044 4353 9988 / 98403 94477 / Whatsapp : 09710729833**

Major Pillars of India–Mauritius Relations:

Political Relations:

- **India and Mauritius maintain regular high-level political engagement**, supported by frequent visits and institutional dialogue.
- **Both countries cooperate closely on regional stability, sustainable development, maritime governance and economic integration.**
- **The Enhanced Strategic Partnership** has broadened cooperation into emerging sectors including the **blue economy, digital transformation and climate resilience.**

Strategic and Maritime Cooperation:

- **Mauritius is a key maritime partner for safeguarding India's interests in the western Indian Ocean.**
- **India assists Mauritius through joint surveillance of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), hydrographic surveys, coastal surveillance radar systems and maritime domain awareness.**
- **Defence cooperation includes military training, supply of defence equipment, deployment of Indian advisers, coordinated patrols and bilateral exercises.**
- **Mauritius is an important partner under India's SAGAR Vision, Vision MAHASAGAR and Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative.**
- **Both countries cooperate in combating piracy, illegal fishing, narcotics trafficking and other non-traditional maritime security threats.**

Economic and Commercial Relations:

- **Total bilateral trade during FY 2024–25 reached approximately USD 887.25 million**, reflecting sustained growth over the past two decades.
- **Indian exports include petroleum products, pharmaceuticals, machinery, textiles, automobiles and processed food products**, while Mauritius exports scrap metals, agricultural commodities, textiles and seafood products.
- **Bilateral trade has expanded by more than four times since 2005–06**, indicating increasing economic integration.

Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA):

- **The CECPA was signed in 2021**, becoming India's first trade agreement with an African country.
- **The agreement promotes trade in goods and services, investment flows, financial cooperation and improved market access.**
- **It also supports deeper value-chain integration and stronger private-sector participation between both economies.**

Financial and Investment Relations:

- **Mauritius has historically been one of the largest sources of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into India**, largely because of its favourable tax framework and the **Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA).**
- **The DTAA was revised in 2016 to address treaty shopping, round-tripping of funds and tax avoidance**, thereby improving transparency and aligning with international tax standards.

Treaty Shopping:

- **Treaty shopping refers to the practice of routing investments through an intermediary country solely to obtain tax benefits available under a bilateral tax treaty.**

- Such arrangements may enable investors who are not genuine residents of a treaty partner to access preferential tax treatment, reducing the effectiveness of tax agreements.

Development Partnership:

- **India has emerged as Mauritius' leading development partner**, supporting infrastructure, healthcare, education, governance and digital transformation.
- **The Metro Express Project** has significantly improved urban public transport and connectivity.
- **The new Supreme Court Building**, constructed with Indian grant assistance, symbolizes judicial cooperation and democratic partnership.
- **The ENT Hospital**, Civil Service College, Forensic Science Laboratory and multiple community development projects have strengthened Mauritius' social infrastructure.
- **India has also supported digital governance, information technology initiatives and capacity enhancement across government institutions.**

Cultural and Diaspora Relations:

- **People of Indian origin constitute nearly 70% of Mauritius' population**, making the diaspora the strongest cultural bridge between the two countries.
- **Languages such as Hindi, Bhojpuri, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi and Urdu continue to be widely spoken and preserved.**
- **Festivals including Diwali, Holi and Maha Shivaratri are celebrated as national events**, reflecting deep civilizational linkages.
- **Institutions such as the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Rabindranath Tagore Institute and the World Hindi Secretariat promote cultural, linguistic and educational cooperation.**

Capacity Building and Human Resource Development:

- **India supports Mauritius through the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme, ICCR scholarships, professional training, skill development and digital governance initiatives.**
- **Civil servants, defence personnel and technical professionals regularly receive training in Indian institutions**, strengthening long-term institutional cooperation.

Cooperation in Multilateral Forums:

- **India and Mauritius cooperate closely in the United Nations (UN), Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), International Solar Alliance (ISA), Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) and Global South initiatives.**
- **Mauritius has consistently supported India's positions on several international issues**, while India supports Mauritius' sovereignty claim over the Chagos Archipelago.

Significance of Mauritius for India:

Strategic Importance:

- **Mauritius serves as India's gateway to the western Indian Ocean**, enhancing maritime security and safeguarding major Sea Lines of Communication.
- **Its location strengthens India's Indo-Pacific strategy**, regional maritime presence and role as a net security provider.

Economic Importance:

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- **Mauritius functions as an important investment and financial gateway**, facilitating India's engagement with African markets.
- **The CECPA creates opportunities for expanding bilateral trade, services and investment cooperation.**

Geopolitical Importance:

- **A strong partnership with Mauritius helps India balance growing extra-regional influence in the Indian Ocean**, particularly amid increasing strategic competition.
- **The partnership reinforces India's leadership in the Global South and strengthens regional stability.**

Challenges in Bilateral Relations:

- **Growing strategic competition from external powers, particularly China, has intensified geopolitical competition in the western Indian Ocean.**
- **Sensitive issues relating to strategic infrastructure and national sovereignty require careful diplomatic management.**
- **Bilateral trade remains concentrated in a limited range of products, highlighting the need for diversification.**
- **Financial cooperation continues to face regulatory and taxation-related challenges despite reforms.**
- **Mauritius remains highly vulnerable to climate change, sea-level rise and extreme weather events, increasing the importance of climate resilience cooperation.**

Way Forward:

- **India and Mauritius should deepen maritime security and defence cooperation**, particularly in maritime domain awareness, coastal surveillance and disaster response.
- **Effective implementation of the CECPA should be prioritized** to unlock greater trade and investment potential.
- **Partnerships in the blue economy, renewable energy, digital technologies, fintech and innovation should be expanded.**
- **People-to-people exchanges, higher education collaboration, tourism and cultural engagement should receive greater emphasis.**
- **Timely completion of infrastructure and connectivity projects will further strengthen the Enhanced Strategic Partnership.**
- **Both countries should work together to promote a secure, inclusive and rules-based Indian Ocean Region under Vision MAHASAGAR and SAGAR.**

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Terms:

- **SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region):** India's maritime vision promoting regional security, sustainable development and cooperative growth in the Indian Ocean.
- **Vision MAHASAGAR:** India's expanded maritime cooperation framework focusing on security, connectivity, development and partnership across the Indian Ocean Region.
- **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ):** A maritime zone extending up to **200 nautical miles** from a coastal State's baseline, where the State enjoys sovereign rights over marine resources.
- **Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs):** Major international maritime routes essential for global trade, energy transportation and naval movement.
- **Treaty Shopping:** The practice of routing investments through another country to obtain unintended tax treaty benefits.

UPSC Prelims Facts:

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- **Mauritius became independent in 1968** and adopted a **republican form of government in 1992.**
- **Port Louis is the capital and principal port of Mauritius.**
- **The CECPA (2021) is India's first trade agreement with an African country.**
- **The World Hindi Secretariat is headquartered in Mauritius.**
- **India supports Mauritius' sovereignty claim over the Chagos Archipelago, while the United Kingdom continues to be involved in the territorial dispute**