



SAGAR TO MAHASAGAR: REDEFINING INDIAN OCEAN GOVERNANCE STRATEGY

Sushil Goswami

Assistant Professor of Law, Gujarat National Law University.

Abstract

India's maritime vision and diplomacy has undergone a significant strategic transformation in the 21st century, evolving from the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) doctrine to the broader and more ambitious MAHASAGAR strategy. This shift reflects India's growing recognition of the Indian Ocean as not just a regional strategic space but as a pivotal axis of global geopolitics and economic interdependence. The SAGAR initiative emphasized regional cooperation, maritime security and inclusive growth within the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). However, emerging transnational threats, regional maritime influences and the evolving Indo-Pacific architecture necessitated a more expansive vision for India. MAHASAGAR redefines India's approach to Indian Ocean governance by integrating blue economy priorities, climate resilience, sustainable development and strategic multilateralism.

This paper examines the doctrinal transition from SAGAR to MAHASAGAR and evaluates its implications for India's maritime diplomacy and architecture from the perspective of its ambition to take leadership in global ocean governance. It argues that MAHASAGAR positions India not merely as a regional maritime power but as a responsible global maritime stakeholder.

Keywords: SAGAR, MAHASAGAR, Indian Ocean, Maritime Strategy, Blue Economy, Ocean Diplomacy, India.

Introduction

India's maritime vision and strategy in the 21st century is not merely a reaction of shifting global dynamics but a well-calculated strategic recalibration rooted in the country's civilizational ethos and evolving national interest. Bounded by over 11098.81 kilometers of coastline¹ and surrounded by the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean, India has possessed a natural maritime orientation. Historically, Indian maritime trade flourished through ancient ports like Lothal, Muziris and Tamralipta, engaging with civilisations across East Africa, Southeast Asia and the Middle East. However, in the post-independence period, India's strategic focus remained predominantly continental, shaped by land-border conflicts and internal development priorities. Post-1991 economic liberalisation phase and the subsequent rise of maritime trade and transnational threats, India began to reassert its maritime presence with renewed drive.

This revival of Indian approach has been shaped by a convergence of geopolitical recalibrations, economic imperatives, national security and environmental concerns. In recent decades, the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has emerged as one of the world's most critical maritime space, carrying approximately 80% of global seaborne oil trade and about 60% of global maritime traffic. Given India's geographic position in the IOR and its dependence on sea-borne trade for economic growth and energy security, maritime affairs gained strategic primacy. China's increasing presence in the region through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), port infrastructure development (Hambantota, Gwadar) and

¹ As revised vide circular no. MR-14011/1/2024-TRW (S) of the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways, Government of India, dated 29th April 2025.



growing naval presence into the Indian Ocean, including the establishment of its first overseas base in Djibouti has compounded in the revival of Indian approach.

In response to these challenges and opportunities, in March 2015, on the jetty at Port Louis, the Prime Minister of India visualised the doctrine of SAGAR “Security and Growth for All in the Region” rooted and guided by the Indian philosophy of “*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*” (the world is one family). The launch of the SAGAR initiative marked a coherent maritime strategy focused on cooperative regionalism and outlined India’s five-pillar maritime agenda. This doctrine marked the first publicly articulated maritime strategic framework of India. It emphasised cooperative security, capacity building, sustainable development and regional integration as pillars of India’s maritime engagement in the Indian Ocean Region.² In IOR India projected itself as a “net security provider,” aiming to support regional states in maintaining freedom of navigation, maritime law enforcement, disaster relief and environmental sustainability. SAGAR was deeply rooted in India’s Act East and Neighbourhood First policies and aligned with regional mechanisms such as IORA and IONS.³

In the late 2010s and early 2020s, the Indo-Pacific emerged as a defining geopolitical construct, increasingly replacing the Asia-Pacific framework and expanding the scope of maritime strategic thought from the Indian Ocean to the western Pacific. The establishment of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) among India, the United States, Japan and Australia marked a renewed commitment to a rule-based maritime order in the region. Furthermore, India’s growing aspirations as a leading power in region were reflected in its G20 presidency, active role in the BRICS group and repeated calls for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. These ambitions called for a new maritime strategic vision that could align India’s regional interests with global maritime governance objectives.

On 12 March 2025, in Mauritius, Prime Minister of India unveiled “MAHASAGAR - Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth across Regions”, explicitly portraying it as “beyond the doctrine of SAGAR.” MAHASAGAR is more than a semantic upgrade from SAGAR. This framework signified a strategic upgrade from the regionally focused SAGAR to a more assertive, globally attuned Indian maritime doctrine. MAHASAGAR envisages expanding India’s engagement in the blue economy, enhancing maritime domain awareness, deepening naval diplomacy and building multilateral alliances across the Indo-Pacific and beyond. It represents a shift from limited regional stewardship to broader strategic assertion in global maritime affairs.

The transition from SAGAR to MAHASAGAR reflects more than a change in nomenclature. It symbolises India’s evolution from a maritime power with regional inspiration to one with global maritime aspirations. It represents a progression from bilateral and trilateral maritime engagements to multilateral diplomacy and from tactical naval operations to strategic ocean governance.

Conceptual Foundations of SAGAR

The articulation of India’s SAGAR vision in March 2015 marked a defining moment in the evolution of the Indian maritime doctrine. For the first time in post-independence India, a maritime security and

² Ministry of External Affairs, ‘India’s Vision for the Indian Ocean Region- SAGAR’ (Press Release, March 2015) <https://mea.gov.in>

³ Tanvi Madan, *Fateful Triangle: How China Shapes India-US Relations* (Brookings Institution Press 2020) 139.



regional growth as interconnected objectives, national strategy was framed. Announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to Mauritius, “SAGAR Security and Growth for All in the Region” sought to position India as a responsible maritime power deeply invested in the peace, prosperity and sustainability of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). It emerged not only as a counter-strategy to growing Chinese maritime assertiveness but also as an affirmation of India’s historical and geopolitical significance in the Indian Ocean.⁴

Strategically, SAGAR represented a natural extension of India's maritime historical tradition and its civilisational outreach across the seas. Ancient Indian texts and archaeological evidence shows robust Indian maritime engagements across Southeast Asia, East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Having such rich legacy, SAGAR aligned and invoked India’s maritime presence with its historical depth, attempting to forge a normative identity as a benevolent and inclusive maritime actor. The use of the term "growth for all" embedded development diplomacy within maritime security, ensuring that India’s outreach was not perceived as hegemonic but cooperative and capacity-enhancing.⁵

The conceptual framework of SAGAR rested on four interdependent pillars. First, it emphasized the importance of maritime security, particularly through joint surveillance, enhanced maritime domain awareness (MDA), anti-piracy operations and disaster response mechanisms. Second, it prioritized capacity building and technical assistance to IOR littoral states, including training their navies, supporting hydrographic surveys and establishing coastal radar networks. Third, SAGAR aimed at economic and infrastructure development, particularly in underdeveloped coastal regions, island nations and strategic chokepoints. This included India's multi sectoral development assistance including ports in Seychelles, Mauritius, Maldives and Sri Lanka. Fourth, SAGAR integrated environmental protection and climate resilience, acknowledging the existential threats faced by Small Island developing states in the context of rising sea level and ocean acidification.

SAGAR further complemented and operationalized India’s broader foreign policy goals, namely Neighborhood First, Act East and the development of blue economy diplomacy. SAGAR allowed India to synchronise its strategic, economic and developmental engagements through maritime sector. A key dimension of SAGAR was its ambition to establish India as a “net security provider” in the Indian Ocean. Which implies the ability of India not only to secure its own interests but also to ensure a stable and secure maritime environment for others. India operationalized this role through its naval diplomacy, capacity-building missions and rapid humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) responses e.g. the 2015 water crisis in the Maldives, the cyclone relief efforts in Mozambique and Madagascar. Such practices allowed India to strengthen its legitimacy as a compassionate maritime actor.

However, from an analytical standpoint, SAGAR was more of a strategic vision than a codified national maritime strategy. Thereby, limited its ability to offer clear mandates to stakeholders across India’s maritime bureaucracy. While it offered a coherent narrative, its institutional implementation was often uneven and dependent on the initiative of individual ministries and naval commands.

⁴ Ministry of External Affairs, ‘India’s Vision for the Indian Ocean Region – SAGAR’ (Press Release, March 2015) <https://mea.gov.in>

⁵ Gurpreet S Khurana, ‘India’s SAGAR Vision: Enhancing Maritime Cooperation in the Indian Ocean’ (2016) 12(1) *Maritime Affairs* 1, 6.



Implementation of SAGAR

Since its inception, the SAGAR vision has informed and influenced a wide range of India's maritime diplomatic, security and developmental initiatives. While it was never institutionalized through a formal policy document, it operated as a flexible strategic umbrella guiding India's engagement with the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). One of its most visible impacts was the reinvigoration of multilateral and regional maritime diplomacy, particularly through initiatives like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). India took proactive leadership roles in these forums, hosting ministerial meetings, proposing institutional reforms and pushing for enhanced cooperation on maritime security, trade facilitation and disaster preparedness.⁶

Bilateral engagements under the SAGAR framework were equally robust. India expanded its naval footprint through Colombo security conclave, exercises and joint operations with countries such as the Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and even beyond the IOR with France and Australia. Exercises like MILAN, SIMBEX (with Singapore), SLINEX (with Sri Lanka), and CORPAT (with Indonesia and Thailand) significantly enhanced interoperability and communication between naval forces. These engagements not only enhanced India's maritime readiness but also reinforced its image as a reliable security partner committed to maintaining peace and stability in the region.⁷

Another important pillar of SAGAR was capacity building and technical assistance, particularly for smaller island nations. India supported hydrographic surveys, provided coastal surveillance radar systems and trained naval and coast guard personnel in countries such as Mauritius, Maldives and Seychelles. The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC) programme of Ministry of External has been one of the major bench mark in this by providing technical and economic capacity building support to various countries thereby reasserting Indian capacity and expertise in various domains. These measures contributed significantly to maritime domain awareness (MDA) across the region, enhancing regional states' ability to monitor, protect, and manage their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs).⁸ The Indian Navy and the Indian Coast Guard played critical roles in implementing this aspect of SAGAR, often extending logistical and operational support during humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) missions.

SAGAR also influenced infrastructure development and port diplomacy. India invested in the expansion of port facilities in Chabahar (Iran), Sittwe (Myanmar) and infrastructure in Seychelles and Mauritius. Through the broader Sagarmala initiative, although separate in origin but complementary in scope of SAGAR, India sought to integrate coastal development and maritime logistics as part of its blue economy strategy. These projects were not only infrastructural in nature but also geopolitically enabler.

SAGAR to MAHASAGAR: A paradigm Shift

The announcement of the MAHASAGAR vision marked a significant evolution and shift in India's maritime strategy. While SAGAR focused on fostering regional maritime stability within the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), MAHASAGAR (Maritime and Allied Security and Growth for All Regionally) sought to recalibrate India's maritime outreach by expanding its operational and strategic scope to

⁶ Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), 'IORA Action Plan 2017–2021' <https://iora.int>

⁷ Ministry of Defence (India), *Annual Report 2020–2021* <https://mod.gov.in> accessed 15 July 2025.

⁸ Indian Navy, 'Naval Diplomacy Reports 2015–2022' <https://indiannavy.nic.in> accessed 15 July 2025.



encompass the broader Indo-Pacific and the global maritime commons. This shift in orientation did not merely reflect ambition but necessity, born out of a convergence of regional anxieties, global aspirations and an increasingly complex maritime security environment.⁹

One of the foremost strategic drivers of the transition was the rise of the Indo-Pacific as the dominant geopolitical maritime theatre. The Indo-Pacific, as a maritime construct, binds the Indian Ocean with the western and central Pacific Ocean, thereby integrating South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia and Oceania into a single strategic continuum. The region accounts for over 60% of global GDP, 50% of global trade and is home to several of the world's busiest and most strategic maritime chokepoints such as the Strait of Malacca, the Lombok Strait and the Strait of Hormuz.¹⁰

China's assertiveness in the South China Sea, its increasing naval presence into the IOR, and the global scale of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) created significant strategic anxieties across the region. Chinese-funded port facilities in Gwadar (Pakistan), Hambantota (Sri Lanka), Kyaukpyu (Myanmar) and investment in East Africa were not just infrastructure investments but nodes in a global maritime network designed to enhance Beijing's strategic depth. MAHASAGAR, therefore, signified a timely strategic elevation as a move to project India as a pole of power in a multipolar Indo-Pacific.

Simultaneously, the emergence and consolidation of strategic Quad (India, the United States, Japan and Australia) provided both the opportunity and the necessity for India to expand its maritime vision. The Quad, often described as a strategic discourse emphasises on freedom of navigation, respect for international law (especially UNCLOS) and building maritime capacity in the Indo-Pacific. The ambition of India on these aspects, necessitated a conceptual upgrade from SAGAR to MAHASAGAR thereby, offering a unifying doctrine that could accommodate both regional partnerships and global coalitions, whereby will be improving India's strategic coherence and diplomatic engagement.

Beyond security concerns, MAHASAGAR also addressed economic and environmental imperatives, especially the promotion of the blue economy. The oceans are emerging as vital economic frontiers with increasing emphasis on fisheries, marine biotechnology, offshore renewable energy, deep-sea mining and maritime logistics. India's own Blue Economy Policy Framework (2021) recognised the oceans as "engines of economic growth" and sought to harmonise development with sustainability.¹¹ However, the realisation of blue economy potential required not just domestic reforms but transnational cooperation, maritime governance mechanisms and regional norms objectives that MAHASAGAR could better suited to achieve through its broadened multilateral economic engagement framework.

MAHASAGAR in Action: Strategic Features

The articulation of MAHASAGAR has brought with it a more structured and action-oriented maritime doctrine, expanding the operational envelope of Indian diplomacy and defence in the maritime domain. Unlike SAGAR, which remained largely aspirational and regional, MAHASAGAR integrates hard and soft maritime power tools into a unified framework that projects India's influence across the Indo-

⁹ Press Information Bureau, 'Prime Minister Unveils MAHASAGAR Vision for Indo-Pacific' (PIB Release, August 2023) <https://pib.gov.in>

¹⁰ Indian Ocean Commission, *Strategic Review of Maritime Trade in the Indo-Pacific* (IOC Report 2023) 17.

¹¹ Ministry of Earth Sciences, *National Blue Economy Policy Draft* (Government of India, 2021) <https://moes.gov.in>.



Pacific and into global maritime governance mechanisms. The operationalisation of this doctrine is visible through a range of diplomatic, military, economic and environmental initiatives.

A fundamental feature of MAHASAGAR is the enhanced emphasis on the blue economy, which has emerged as both an economic and strategic priority. India's Blue Economy Policy Framework outlines critical sectors such as deep-sea fishing, offshore wind energy, seabed mining, marine biotechnology, maritime transport and tourism as areas of potential cooperation and national growth.¹² Under MAHASAGAR, India has intensified cooperation with Indian Ocean littorals, ASEAN states, Pacific Island Countries (PICs) and African coastal states to develop sustainable marine economies. For instance, through the International Solar Alliance and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, India has integrated marine renewable energy and climate resilience into its maritime developmental strategy. The growing convergence between ecological preservation and strategic diplomacy has thus created a niche for India as a leader in sustainable maritime development.

Simultaneously, MAHASAGAR elevates Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) and information sharing as critical pillars of regional and global security. The doctrine further consolidates India's commitment to maritime security and naval diplomacy. India's maritime exercises have multiplied in scale, complexity and geography. The annual Exercise Malabar, now institutionalised as a Quadrilateral naval drill with the US, Japan and Australia, has evolved into a potent demonstration of naval interoperability and strategic gestur. Likewise, bilateral and trilateral engagements such as Varuna (with France), JIMEX (with Japan), and PASSEX (with Indonesia and the Philippines) highlight the role of naval diplomacy under MAHASAGAR.¹³ Indian naval ships have increasingly been deployed for exercises or otherwise in non-traditional theatres such as the Red Sea, the western Pacific and Arctic waters thereby marking a decisive shift from littoral defence to blue water power projection. The commissioning of INS Vikrant, India's first indigenously built aircraft carrier and the expansion of the nuclear submarine programme underlines the hard-power dimension of this shift in doctrine.

India's track record in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations has been broadened and formalised. In recent years, India has positioned itself as a "first responder" to natural disasters in the region, as seen during the cyclone Tauktae in Mozambique or the oil spill response in Mauritius.¹⁴ These operations not only generate goodwill but also deepen India's diplomatic capital in the Global South thereby, MAHASAGAR will further institutionalises maritime humanitarianism as a strategic asset.

In fora such as the United Nations, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and during its G20 presidency, India has actively advocated for inclusive and equitable ocean governance. India's stand in support of UNCLOS based freedom of navigation, peaceful resolution of maritime disputes and opposition to unilateral changes in the maritime status quo reflects its commitment to a rule based international maritime order¹⁵ and the doctrine of MAHASAGAR upholds the India's position including Indian drive for technology sharing, equitable benefit distribution, concern for developing countries and the protection of marine genetic resources.

¹² Ministry of Earth Sciences, *Blue Economy Policy Draft* (Government of India 2021) <https://moes.gov.in>.

¹³ Ministry of Defence (India), *Naval Exercises and Strategic Engagements Report 2023* <https://mod.gov.in>.

¹⁴ Indian Navy, 'HADR Operations and Mission SAGAR Reports 2020–2023' <https://indiannavy.nic.in>

¹⁵ United Nations, 'India's Statement at UN Oceans Conference 2022' <https://www.un.org>



Importantly, MAHASAGAR is also a platform for India to engage with Small Island Developing States and littoral countries on climate resilience, blue carbon ecosystems and coastal adaptation. India has launched initiatives such as the India-UN Development Partnership Fund and the SAGAR-Mitra programme to provide technological, financial, and policy support for coastal infrastructure and marine biodiversity protection. In this respect, India positions itself not only as a maritime power but also as an environmental steward of the oceans.¹⁶

Thus, MAHASAGAR in action reveals a doctrine that is simultaneously strategic and developmental, hard and soft, national and multilateral shift from SAGAR. It integrates India's military strength, technological capability, diplomatic networks, and ecological responsibilities into a coherent oceanic strategy. The doctrine's strength lies in its multidimensionality, allowing India to respond flexibly to traditional and non-traditional maritime challenges while cultivating long-term partnerships across the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

Legal and Institutional Framework

The success of India's maritime strategy under MAHASAGAR rests not only on its diplomatic and naval outreach but also on the robustness of its legal and institutional foundations. As India projects itself as a normative power in maritime affairs, it is imperative that its actions are anchored in a sound legal framework both domestic and at international level. MAHASAGAR, in this context, serves as a doctrinal bridge between India's evolving maritime practices and its legal commitments under international law, while also prompting important institutional reforms at the national level.

At the international level, India's adherence to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), 1982, forms the backbone of its maritime legal architecture at national level. India ratified UNCLOS in 1995 and has consistently supported the Convention as the comprehensive legal framework for ocean governance, including provisions relating to the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), continental shelf, maritime delimitation and freedom of navigation.¹⁷ India has actively invoked UNCLOS principles in diplomatic forums, especially to assert the importance of rule based navigation and peaceful dispute resolution, such as in the South China Sea disputes where it has reiterated that maritime claims must be based on legal entitlements under UNCLOS rather than historical assertions or military coercion.¹⁸ The MAHASAGAR vision strengthens this legal commitment by promoting UNCLOS aligned cooperation among Indo-Pacific countries, encouraging transparency and compliance with international maritime norms and simultaneously cast much more strengthened obligation to its commitment for international law and UNCLOS.

In recent years, India has been proactive in the negotiations of the BBNJ Treaty (Agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction), which aims to regulate marine genetic resources, area-based management tools, environmental impact assessments and capacity building on the high seas. India's engagement in the Intergovernmental Conference on BBNJ under the aegis of the United Nations reflects its willingness and commitment to shape global maritime environmental norms, especially in ensuring fair and equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms and securing technological access

¹⁶ Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations, 'India-UN Development Partnership Fund' (2022) <https://pminewyork.gov.in>

¹⁷ United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (adopted 10 December 1982, entered into force 16 November 1994) 1833 UNTS 3 (UNCLOS).

¹⁸ Ministry of External Affairs, 'India's Statement on South China Sea at ASEAN Regional Forum 2022' <https://mea.gov.in>



for developing countries.¹⁹ Through MAHASAGAR, India now links these treaty negotiations, obligations and rights with national interest and national development.

Institutionally, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) remains the nodal agency for implementing India's maritime diplomacy with dedicated divisions now focusing on oceanic cooperation, blue economy diplomacy and Indo-Pacific engagement. MAHASAGAR has stimulated the MEA and its missions abroad, particularly in IOR and Pacific Island countries to further augment the vision of MAHASAGAR. Furthermore, India's diplomatic coordination with regional organisations such as AALCO, IORA, BIMSTEC, ASEAN, Colombo Security conclave and the African Union has intensified through dedicated maritime activities and working groups focusing on marine governance.

Economically and scientifically, India's commitment to the blue economy and sustainable ocean development is administered through the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) and the Ministry of Shipping. The *Blue Economy Policy Draft (2021)* formulated by MoES aims to harmonise India's economic interests with environmental responsibilities, including climate-smart port development, offshore wind energy and marine biotechnology research.²⁰ Under MAHASAGAR, India has to intensify efforts to develop national regulatory regimes for deep-sea mining, marine genetic resource extraction and control of marine pollution in areas governed by international instruments like the International Seabed Authority (ISA), the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and MARPOL. These efforts are expected to culminate in a comprehensive Marine institutional framework aligned with global standards.

Domestically, India has also taken steps to upgrade its maritime legal architecture. The Maritime Zones of India Act, 1976 and the Territorial Waters, Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone and Other Maritime Zones Act, 1976 are currently under review to reflect contemporary geopolitical realities and environmental concerns. India's engagement with global shipping regulations, including ballast water management, ship recycling and emissions reduction under IMO frameworks, also aligns with the environmental goals embedded in MAHASAGAR.

Importantly, India has also introduced inter-ministerial platforms and among others the National Maritime Security Coordinator (NMSC) under the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) to oversee coordination among 15+ maritime stakeholders, including customs, shipping, fisheries and port authorities. This reflects an important administrative reform aimed at reducing inter-agency fragmentation that historically plagued maritime governance in India.²¹ It enables better implementation of MAHASAGAR linked projects, especially those involving multiple stakeholders such as port development, anti-trafficking operations and international aid missions and thereby certainly shall play a major role in materialising the vision of MAHASAHAR.

India's legal and institutional initiatives should be increasingly inclusive of civil society, academia and the private sector. The Sagarmala Innovation and Start-up Policy encourages maritime entrepreneurship, while ocean-focused research institutes like the National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) and Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) collaborate internationally on projects related to ocean modelling, climate resilience, and early warning systems.

¹⁹ United Nations, 'BBNJ Intergovernmental Conference, Session Summaries 2023' <https://www.un.org/bbnj>

²⁰ Ministry of Earth Sciences, *Blue Economy Policy Draft (2021)* <https://moes.gov.in>



The specialised institutions such as National Law Universities, Indian Maritime University, School of Integrated Coastal and Maritime Security Studies in Rashtriya Raksha University have been leading the courses on maritime domain so as to build the capacity in India. Accordingly, multi-stakeholder partnerships shall be a key and will enhance the operational ecosystem for MAHASAGAR and embed resilience into its long-term institutional architecture.

Challenges Ahead

Despite its ambitious scope and multidimensional approach, the MAHASAGAR doctrine is not without significant operational, strategic and institutional challenges. These challenges arise not only from external geopolitical dynamics but also from internal systemic constraints that affect India's ability to effectively project and sustain its maritime vision. For MAHASAGAR to succeed as a comprehensive maritime doctrine, India must address both domestic limitations and emerging vulnerabilities with focused reforms, resource mobilisation, and diplomatic calibration.

A primary challenge lies in resource asymmetry, particularly in comparison to China's expansive maritime footprint. While India has made notable progress in naval modernisation and blue economy initiatives, the scale of its maritime investments be it port infrastructure, shipbuilding or connectivity corridors, remains a critical issue. *ATMANIRBHAR* Bharat has been one of the noble initiative and shall be complimentary to fill the gaps. India's fragmented port development policies undermines its ability to mount a symmetrical maritime counterweight and therefore, a consolidation shall be of immense support in materialising the vision.

Another pressing concern is the persistent bureaucratic fragmentation in India's maritime governance ecosystem. Although recent reforms such as the appointment of the National Maritime Security Coordinator (NMSC) under the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) are steps in the right direction, however, inter-agency coordination among various maritime stakeholders including the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Shipping, Ministry of Earth Sciences and coastal state governments need to be further institutionalized. Environmental and climate-related vulnerabilities also pose a growing challenge to India's maritime aspirations. Coastal erosion, interest of coastal community, rising sea levels, increasing intensity of cyclones and degradation of marine ecosystems threaten the sustainability of India's blue economy ambitions.

As MAHASAGAR seeks to promote blue growth, India must simultaneously invest in climate-resilient port infrastructure, marine biodiversity protection and disaster response systems through advanced scientific planning and substantial financial outlays India's commitments under the Paris Agreement and its own Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) will require policy alignment with maritime activities, including decarbonisation of shipping and protection of marine ecosystems such as mangroves and seagrasses.

Further, India's limited maritime human capital and skill gaps in ocean sciences, naval engineering, maritime law and maritime logistics pose long-term capacity constraints. While India has world-class institutions such as the Indian Maritime University, the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), IITs, National Law Universities, Rashtriya Raksha University and the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) etc. however, these institutions require to be frontline maritime policymaking institutions through their policy oriented research aligned with the vision of India.



MAHASAGAR's success will require significant investments in such institutions and their education, training and knowledge generation.

Conclusion

The transition from SAGAR to MAHASAGAR represents a pivotal transformation in India's maritime vision. This does not reflect merely a shift in terminology but a comprehensive shift of strategic, diplomatic, legal, institutional and developmental approaches to oceanic engagement. MAHASAGAR signifies India's spirited aspiration to transcend regional confines and assume a proactive, shaping role in global maritime governance.

MAHASAGAR offers a forward-looking outline for India to contribute meaningfully to the governance of the global commons. The vision of Government of India, enables India to become champion in equity, sustainability and cooperative security in maritime affairs in vital, multipolar and environmentally precarious world. As global attention increasingly turns to the oceans for resources, resilience and regulation, India's oceanic diplomacy anchored in MAHASAGAR has the potential to serve as both a stabilising force and a beacon of inclusive maritime leadership. In essence, MAHASAGAR is not just India's maritime doctrine, it is an expression of India's broader vision for a just, rules-based and sustainable global order. It encapsulates the country's maritime heritage, strategic foresight and diplomatic maturity, making it a foundation of India's foreign policy in the 21st century.

The MAHASAGAR vision with proactive initiatives and visionary steps of government has catalysed important transformations in India's legal and institutional engagement with the maritime domain. By aligning its domestic legislation with international norms and strengthening inter-agency coordination, India is not only legitimising its maritime ambitions but also shaping the rules and mechanisms of ocean governance in a way that reflects its values of equity, sustainability and strategic autonomy.

In conclusion, the path to realising MAHASAGAR's vision is passing through the multifaceted challenges. However, the sustained commitment to strategic planning, inter-agency coordination and institutional reform and international engagement, the MAHASAGAR will have significant results and will strengthen the future generation of BHARAT.