

India Blue Economy: Challenges and Opportunities

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The concept of the blue economy has emerged as a pivotal framework integrating economic growth, environmental sustainability, and maritime security. Since Narendra Modi assumed office in 2014, India has actively leveraged the blue economy to strengthen its strategic position in the Indo-Pacific, reflecting a shift from a traditional maritime economy to a comprehensive geopolitical tool. This paper examines how India's blue economy policies evolved under Modi's leadership, emphasizing key initiatives such as SAGAR and the Sagarmala Program. These initiatives underscore India's ambition to not only harness marine resources for economic growth but also to enhance regional stability and maritime governance. Despite its strategic importance, the development of the blue economy faces significant challenges, including marine pollution, overfishing, climate change, and infrastructure deficiencies. Moreover, geopolitical tensions, particularly with China, complicate regional cooperation, requiring India to balance economic aspirations with security concerns. India's multilateral engagements—notably through the Quad, ASEAN, and BIMSTEC—demonstrate its commitment to safeguarding maritime trade routes, fostering sustainable marine resource management, and addressing security threats such as piracy and illegal fishing. This study employs a qualitative content analysis of official policy documents, international agreements, and academic literature to assess India's strategic use of the blue economy as a regional and global policy instrument. The findings suggest that while India has made considerable progress in advancing its maritime economy, future success will depend on enhanced regulatory frameworks, technological innovation, regional cooperation, and climate resilience measures. By adopting a holistic and sustainable approach, India can solidify its role as a leading maritime power in the Indo-Pacific, contributing to both economic prosperity and geopolitical stability.

Keywords: India; Blue Economy; Indo-Pacific; Maritime Security; SAGAR; Quad; Geopolitics; Sustainable Development

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of the “blue economy” emerged in the early 2000s and gained significant traction as a research and policy framework following its prominence at the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). At its core, the blue economy refers to the sustainable utilization of marine and ocean resources to drive economic growth, enhance societal well-being, and safeguard marine ecosystems and biodiversity. Key sectors within the blue economy include shipping, marine aquaculture, renewable energy, marine tourism, and marine biotechnology. However, its development faces substantial challenges, such as overfishing, marine pollution, and the escalating impacts of climate change, which pose threats to both the environment and long-term economic stability (Baruah et al., 06/23).

In India, the blue economy has taken center stage in national policy since Narendra Modi assumed office in 2014. Modi recognized the blue economy not merely as a driver of economic growth but as a strategic instrument for positioning India as a regional and global leader. Initiatives such as SAGAR¹, introduced in 2015, and the Sagarmala program, launched in 2016, reflect the Indian government’s integrated approach to fostering economic development, enhancing maritime security, and promoting environmental sustainability in the Indo-Pacific region. These initiatives highlight India’s ambition to leverage the blue economy as a tool to establish leadership in a geopolitically dynamic and economically crucial region (De Estrada, 2020).

Given the Indo-Pacific’s growing strategic importance, where over 60% of the world’s GDP is generated and critical maritime routes traverse, the blue economy has implications that extend beyond national borders. It serves as a framework for addressing global challenges, such as climate change, regional security, and resource competition. Moreover, it plays a vital role in shaping international relations through cooperation with regional frameworks like the Quad² and ASEAN³.

This paper aims to analyze how India’s approach to the blue economy evolved during Narendra Modi’s tenure, spanning 2014 to 2024. The central research question guiding this study is: How has India integrated the development of the blue economy with its strategic vision, including the SAGAR framework, to advance its position as a leader in the Indo-Pacific region?

This study contributes to the growing body of literature by focusing on the intersection of economic development, environmental sustainability, and maritime security within the blue economy. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on either economic or environmental aspects, this paper highlights the strategic utilization of the blue economy as a comprehensive tool in India’s security and foreign policy. By examining the challenges and opportunities inherent in this approach, the research provides insights into how the blue economy can serve as a model for sustainable and strategic development in the Indo-Pacific.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative methodology grounded in content analysis to investigate the evolution of India's blue economy policy during Narendra Modi's governance between 2014 and 2024. The study focuses on how the blue economy has been strategically integrated into India's broader vision for regional and global leadership, particularly through initiatives like SAGAR and the Sagarmala program. These initiatives serve as a lens through which to explore the interplay between economic development, environmental sustainability, and maritime security within India's approach to the Indo-Pacific.

Data for this research was collected from a wide range of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include official Indian government documents, speeches by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, strategic policy reports, and bilateral and multilateral agreements that pertain to the blue economy and Indo-Pacific strategies. Secondary sources consist of peer-reviewed academic research, books, articles, and policy analyses authored by leading scholars in sustainable development, international relations, and maritime security.

The analytical process is based on a structured content analysis, which seeks to identify key policy trends, strategic objectives, and implementation pathways over the past decade. This analysis pays particular attention to three interrelated dimensions: the alignment of economic, environmental, and security priorities within India's blue economy framework; the role of geopolitical frameworks such as the Quad and ASEAN in advancing India's regional positioning; and the strategic use of blue economy initiatives to address challenges such as maritime security, resource competition, and climate resilience. The research applies theoretical perspectives from sustainable development, geopolitics, and international relations to deepen the understanding of these connections and assess their broader implications for India's strategic ambitions in the Indo-Pacific.

This study acknowledges several limitations inherent in its methodological approach. First, it is based on qualitative analysis and does not incorporate quantitative data, which limits its ability to measure the outcomes of policy implementation statistically. Second, the research focuses primarily on India's blue economy strategies and does not conduct a comparative analysis with other countries in the Indo-Pacific region. Finally, the study concentrates on national and regional policies and does not delve into the implementation of these policies at the local level, reflecting the scope and scale of this research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The environmental and climatic conditions of the Indian Ocean significantly impact the blue economy, migration patterns, maritime trade, and regional geopolitics. Over recent decades, climate change has contributed to increasingly

severe tropical storms, floods, droughts, and heatwaves. These climate-related shifts are expected to reduce fish stocks across the ocean, posing challenges for nations heavily dependent on fisheries but lacking the resilience to adapt to climate shocks, including India, Indonesia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, and Thailand. Rapid population growth, rising sea levels, and intensifying tropical cyclones are expected to increase human vulnerability and regional instability. By 2030, coastal regions along the Indian Ocean are projected to have the highest population density globally, placing approximately 340 million people in high-risk coastal zones. Currently, the Bay of Bengal accounts for over 80 percent of global cyclone-related fatalities, despite experiencing only 5 percent of the world's cyclones. Additionally, more frequent and intense heatwaves will have severe consequences for human health and economic stability (Endyka Triono Dachi et al., 2023).

Given these challenges, the blue economy, which integrates the sustainable utilization of marine resources with economic development, has garnered significant scholarly attention, particularly in the context of the Indo-Pacific. The rise of Narendra Modi to power in 2014 marked a significant turning point in India's approach to this region, characterized by the formulation of a new economic and security policy that positions the blue economy as a key instrument in advancing India's global stature. Numerous studies have examined the blue economy from various perspectives, focusing on its challenges, opportunities, and geopolitical and economic implications for the region.

The blue economy serves as a pivotal conceptual framework in modern maritime policy, particularly for developing countries and nations with extensive access to oceans. Defined as the "sustainable industrialization of oceans for the benefit of all," it emphasizes the delicate balance between economic activities and the resilience of marine ecosystems. Smith-Godfrey (2016) highlights that the blue economy is rooted in principles of low carbon emissions, resource efficiency, and social inclusion, which enable the exploitation of the vast economic potential of oceans while maintaining ecological health. Key domains include fishing and aquaculture, marine mining, renewable energy, desalination, and marine waste management, underscoring the urgent need to balance resource use and conservation.

Additionally, the blue economy provides a platform for marine spatial planning, which integrates economic, social, and environmental needs. Such tools enable the efficient management of marine resources while reducing conflicts between competing ocean uses. Within this framework, India recognizes the blue economy as an opportunity to achieve national goals, such as strengthening regional connectivity, developing marine infrastructure, and enhancing its geopolitical influence.

Recent studies describe the complex regional dynamics of the Indo-Pacific. Fudge (2023) underscores the shift of the global economic center of gravity to this region, which strategically connects the Indian Ocean to the Western Pacific. However, he highlights significant security challenges, primarily stemming from China's growing dominance and ongoing geopolitical competition. Fudge also examines the role of the

Quad framework in fostering a stable maritime order, emphasizing the importance of regional partnerships to address economic and security challenge (Fudge, 2023).

Singh explores the blue economy in the Indo-Pacific, emphasizing the environmental and geopolitical challenges that hinder effective collaboration. He asserts that the rising tensions between India and China present a major obstacle to achieving the goals of the blue economy, particularly concerning illegal fishing and resource exploitation (Singh, 2024).

While these studies offer valuable insights, they predominantly focus on specific aspects of the blue economy, such as fishing, maritime security, or great power competition, without examining the integration of economic, security, and environmental dimensions. Furthermore, most analyses consider the blue economy in historical or narrowly regional contexts, rather than within the modern framework of Narendra Modi's leadership. This study aims to bridge these gaps by examining India's blue economy as an integrative component of its regional and international strategy, with a focus on the period from 2014 to 2024.

To fully understand the role of the blue economy in India's policy, it is essential to first explore the historical and geopolitical background of the Indo-Pacific region. The following section will outline the region's evolution as a strategic arena of power struggles among nations, providing a broader context for analyzing India's economic and security policies during 2014-2024.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE INDO-PACIFIC AS A STRATEGIC ARENA

Geographically, the term Indo-Pacific, also referred to as Indo-West Pacific or Indo-Pacific Asia, describes the region extending from the eastern Indian Ocean to the western Pacific Ocean, linked by the Strait of Malacca.

The region serves as a stage for great power rivalry, primarily between the United States and China. While China promotes its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to expand its economic and strategic influence, the United States, alongside key partners such as India, Japan, and Australia, has advanced the vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) to counterbalance Chinese assertiveness. This competition manifests in various dimensions, including infrastructure investments, military presence, and diplomatic alliances (Ghosh, 2023).

The United States has a strategic interest in ensuring that the Indo-Pacific remains a free and open region. Since 1995, a key pillar of U.S. policy in the region has been the principle of Freedom of Navigation. The United States has consistently opposed the use of threats or force in resolving territorial disputes (Fudge, (2023)). Its presence in the Indo-Pacific has become increasingly visible, particularly through its engagement in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), where it has provided support to countries contesting China's maritime claims.

The United States has further reinforced its regional role through the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, a commitment aimed at strengthening the autonomy and resilience of Southeast Asian nations in managing conflicts in the South China Sea. Additionally, U.S. involvement in the Indo-Pacific includes substantial financial commitments, with \$940 billion allocated for regional investment. Given the scale of American engagement, ASEAN countries may find it increasingly challenging to remain neutral amid U.S. efforts to shape regional dynamics (Endyka Triono Dachi et al., 2023).

In recent years, the Indo-Pacific region has undergone significant shifts in regional security dynamics, largely driven by the emergence of the Indo-Pacific strategy (Kratiuk et al., 2023). This strategy was first introduced by former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2016 as the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy, which was subsequently adopted by the United States. The two primary factors motivating Abe's strategy were the rise of China and the relative decline of U.S. influence in Asia.

Washington's actions in the Indo-Pacific are largely driven by its strategy to counterbalance China's growing economic and military influence in the region. In 2011, the United States formally shifted its strategic focus from the Middle East to Asia, a policy move known as the Pivot to Asia. This shift involved rebalancing military resources from U.S. Central Command to U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (Congressional Research Service. (2022)). The rebalancing strategy also rested on two key pillars, one of which was the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)—an initiative designed to establish high trade standards in the Asia-Pacific while deliberately excluding China (Mohanty, 2024).

A concrete manifestation of the strategy—and a demonstration of American commitment to it—was the renaming of the U.S. Pacific Command to the Indo-Pacific Command in June 2018, expanding its jurisdiction over a vast geographic area spanning the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean.

Furthermore, in 2019, the U.S. Department of Defense's characterized the region as “the most consequential region” and “the priority theater” for American strategic engagement. Since then, the Indo-Pacific strategy has gained significant traction, with countries both within and beyond the region—including India, Japan, the Philippines, Mongolia, Australia, the United Kingdom, and France—integrating the Indo-Pacific concept into their national security and foreign policy frameworks, thereby reinforcing its global influence (U.S. Department of Defense, 2019).

These geopolitical developments have profoundly transformed the strategic environment of the Indo-Pacific, continuously reshaping power relations and policy directions among key regional actors.

The strategic competition between China and the United States over regional influence is particularly significant. China's engagement extends beyond security and economic considerations, as it also seeks to assert control over key maritime zones, particularly in the South China Sea and the western coast of Africa (Yanuarti et al., 2020). The increasing geopolitical significance of the Pacific, including Africa's

western coastline, reflects broader shifts in global power dynamics. According to the Global Trends 2030 report, Asia is projected to surpass North America and Europe in terms of national income, trade volume, technological investment, and resource allocation, solidifying its role as a dominant force in global affairs.

The dominant U.S. naval presence in the Indo-Pacific is expected to play a stabilizing role, acting as a balancing force in the region. The U.S. Navy remains far superior to its Chinese counterpart, and prevailing strategic dynamics—coupled with China's economic needs as a developing power—are likely to deter Beijing from pursuing aggressive naval expansion in the Indian Ocean in the near future. However, for the first time since the Portuguese incursions into the region in the early sixteenth century, Western dominance in the Indian Ocean appears to be in relative decline. Although the United States is attempting to redefine and reinforce its position, it may struggle to maintain its traditional level of influence.

Beyond the U.S.-China rivalry, other regional actors such as Japan, Australia, and ASEAN member states actively shape Indo-Pacific dynamics through diverse diplomatic and security initiatives. Each country seeks to protect its national interests while contributing to a balance of power that prevents unilateral dominance. Multilateral frameworks such as the Quad and ASEAN-led mechanisms serve as platforms for cooperation on maritime security, trade, and sustainable development.

The Indo-Pacific has become a key economic hub in recent years, with ongoing geopolitical and geostrategic shifts presenting both opportunities and challenges for the countries in the region. On the one hand, economic growth in this area necessitates cooperation that can reduce poverty and improve living standards for many. On the other hand, the region also provides a platform for the projection of economic and military power, which can foster distrust among regional states (Alharthi & Hanif, 2020).

The Indo-Pacific region faces multifaceted challenges that extend beyond great power competition. Climate change, overfishing, piracy, and maritime security threats pose significant risks to economic stability and regional security. Addressing these challenges necessitates enhanced regional cooperation and sustainable governance mechanisms that align national interests with collective action. The Blue Economy in this region is primarily driven by several key sectors, including maritime trade and transport, as the Indo-Pacific serves as a central artery for global trade, with major sea routes passing through it. Ensuring the safety and security of these maritime corridors is essential for economic stability. Fisheries and aquaculture also play a significant role in the region's economy, supporting a large portion of the world's fishing industry and providing food security and livelihoods for millions (Alharthi & Hanif, 2020). Renewable energy, particularly offshore wind, tidal, and wave energy projects, is gaining momentum, contributing to energy security and reducing reliance on fossil fuels. Marine tourism remains a major economic driver for many Indo-Pacific nations, while marine biotechnology offers opportunities for bioprospecting and the development of pharmaceuticals and other biotechnological products, given the region's rich marine biodiversity.

INDIA'S ROLE IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

India plays a pivotal role in the Indo-Pacific strategic landscape, positioning itself as both a regional power and a key stakeholder in maintaining a stable and rules-based maritime order.

India's maritime positioning grants it strategic significance in the Indo-Pacific, shaping its regional and global ambitions. The country's growing naval capabilities, economic initiatives, and security policies reflect its commitment to maintaining stability and influence in this dynamic geopolitical space. With the Indo-Pacific emerging as a key arena for international competition and cooperation, India has sought to strengthen its maritime presence through strategic partnerships, multilateral engagements, and defense initiatives. Its approach integrates economic development, maritime security, and diplomatic outreach, reinforcing its role as a pivotal actor in shaping the region's security architecture and trade networks (Smith-Godfrey, 2016).

While both China and India seek to expand their naval presence in the Indian Ocean, historically rooted distrust fosters mutual suspicion regarding each other's strategic intentions. Both countries have begun to view the Indian Ocean in terms of strategic prerogatives and responsibilities, a shift that could destabilize the region and serve as a potential flashpoint for future conflict. At the same time, this development suggests that these emerging powers are increasingly assuming responsibility for securing the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) in the region.

Despite its growing maritime aspirations, India remains a cautious naval power, primarily focusing on its core interests in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The United States seeks a greater Indian role in Southeast Asia and actively promotes a strategic partnership with India to counter China's influence in the Indo-Pacific. However, a fundamental challenge lies in the differing priorities of the two nations. While the United States is preoccupied with broader global issues that impact the trajectory of U.S.-India maritime cooperation, India's strategic stakes remain primarily regional. The rivalry between India and China is unlikely to escalate into open conflict, as both nations have long adapted to a relationship of mutual suspicion. Moreover, both countries have a vested interest in maintaining the existing global order, as their economic rise has been facilitated by it rather than in opposition to it.

Against this backdrop, India and China are expected to engage in an increasingly dynamic great-power rivalry in the Indo-Pacific, shaped by both competition and economic interdependence. As major trading partners, their economic ties create a complex and uneasy relationship that prevents direct confrontation while fostering strategic competition. Meanwhile, Pakistan is likely to maintain its strategic alignment with China and continue strengthening its own naval capabilities, further contributing to the evolving security dynamics of the region.

INDIA'S MARITIME ASSETS AND CHALLENGES

India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), covering 2.3 million square kilometers, of which 1.5 million square kilometers have been systematically explored, offers immense potential for economic exploitation and resource management. As the country seeks to strengthen its maritime economy, the sustainable governance of this marine space remains integral to its long-term strategic and economic interests.

Beyond its economic contributions, India's maritime wealth is deeply embedded in its resource potential. The country is increasingly exploring the prospects of deep-sea mining, with a particular focus on the extraction of polymetallic nodules and hydrothermal sulfides, which could significantly bolster its resource security. Simultaneously, India's fisheries sector remains a critical component of food security and employment, supporting millions of livelihoods across coastal communities. In parallel, India is investing in marine renewable energy projects, including offshore wind, tidal energy, and expanded oil and gas exploration, reflecting a broader commitment to sustainable development. As global energy demands shift towards greener alternatives, India's ability to harness its marine energy potential will be crucial in reducing reliance on fossil fuels while advancing climate resilience. Despite these economic opportunities, India's maritime landscape is increasingly vulnerable to climate-induced and anthropogenic challenges. Rising sea levels, accelerated by global climate change, pose an existential threat to low-lying coastal settlements and small island territories, necessitating proactive coastal management and adaptation strategies. Additionally, the frequency and intensity of tropical storms in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea, particularly between 1971 and 2018, have heightened the risks of coastal erosion, infrastructure damage, and displacement of communities. Beyond climate vulnerabilities, the sustainability of marine resources is also under strain due to Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, a widespread challenge in the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea, the Maldives, the Bay of Bengal, the Andaman Sea, and the Gulf of Thailand. Unregulated exploitation of fish stocks threatens both marine biodiversity and the economic stability of fishing-dependent communities. Equally concerning is the issue of marine pollution, driven by plastic waste accumulation, oil spills, and industrial discharge, all of which undermine the ecological balance of India's maritime zones.

In light of these multifaceted challenges and opportunities, India's maritime strategy must adopt an integrated approach that aligns economic priorities with environmental sustainability and security imperatives. Strengthening maritime governance, fostering international collaborations, and investing in technological innovations for marine conservation will be instrumental in ensuring that India's blue economy not only thrives but also contributes to regional stability and global maritime governance. As the Indo-Pacific continues to evolve as a dynamic geopolitical and economic arena, India's ability to assert itself as a leading maritime power will depend on its capacity to navigate the complexities of resource management, environmental resilience, and strategic partnerships. Given these

strategic and economic stakes, India's maritime domain has also become a contested space, particularly in the face of growing geopolitical rivalries in the Indo-Pacific.

As India deepens its engagement in the region, its approach to the blue economy reflects a broader strategic effort to leverage maritime resources for economic growth, security, and geopolitical influence.

INDIA'S STRATEGIC VISION FOR THE INDO-PACIFIC UNDER NARENDRA MODI

Recognizing the Indian Ocean as a domain of paramount strategic importance, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, India's maritime strategy has evolved to encompass both economic and security dimensions, integrating the blue economy as a core component of its broader Indo-Pacific vision.

During Narendra Modi's tenure, India has reinforced its position in the Indo-Pacific through economic and strategic initiatives that integrate maritime security with sustainable development. In 2016, at the International Fleet Review held in Visakhapatnam, Modi underscored the Indian Ocean's significance to the global economy and emphasized India's vision for maritime cooperation in the region. This vision advocates for global collaboration to maintain the maritime domain as a "space of peace and prosperity" rather than a theater of conflict.

INDIA'S BLUE ECONOMY: KEY SECTORS AND OPPORTUNITIES

India's approach to the blue economy presents several strategic opportunities that align with its broader economic and geopolitical objectives. One of the key areas of the blue economy is the enormous economic potential of the oceans, which serve as a major lifeline for trade, employment, and renewable energy development. As stated in one of the workshops on the blue economy:

"The oceans hold the key to the fortunes of the fast evolving global order. Covering 72% of the Earth's surface and constituting over 95% of the biosphere, oceans provide a substantial portion of the world's population with food and livelihood. 80% of the global goods trade travels via sea, and the marine and coastal environment is a big tourist attraction as well. The seabed currently provides 32% of the global supply of hydrocarbons, and oceans hold massive potential for production of renewable energy. Emerging technologies are opening up new frontiers of marine resource development, leading, among other things, to the mining of seabed mineral resources." (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2018).

The expansion of the shipping industry is a key priority, as India aims to increase its presence in the global maritime sector and develop its capabilities as a hub for ship

maintenance and repair, offering both economic and geopolitical advantages. Offshore renewable energy development, including wind and solar projects in the maritime domain, is seen as a crucial component in meeting India's growing energy demands while reducing dependency on fossil fuels (Singh, 2024). Investments in marine aquaculture and biotechnology can contribute to India's food security while promoting the health of marine ecosystems. Moreover, India's Blue Economy policy supports the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 14, which focuses on conserving and sustainably using marine resources. Marine tourism is another avenue for economic expansion, as India can capitalize on its extensive coastline to attract investment and increase employment in coastal regions (2023). By leveraging these opportunities, India can strengthen its maritime economy while ensuring long-term sustainability and resilience in the Indo-Pacific. Its blue economy strategy reflects an integrated approach that combines economic development with environmental conservation, positioning India as a key player in regional maritime governance and sustainable ocean management.

INDIA'S MARITIME STRATEGY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC UNDER MODI

India, with its extensive coastline, occupies a key position in the Indo-Pacific. As a vital maritime hub, the Indian Ocean plays a crucial role in trade and serves as a cornerstone of India's economic and geopolitical ambitions. Recognizing this, since assuming office in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has placed the Indo-Pacific at the center of India's foreign policy. His vision is encapsulated in the SAGAR initiative, introduced in 2015, which integrates maritime security with sustainable economic development. Through SAGAR, India seeks to uphold freedom of navigation, combat non-traditional threats such as piracy and illegal fishing, and strengthen regional partnerships, reinforcing its strategic influence in the Indo-Pacific. (de Estrada, 2020). Despite the fact that the SAGAR policy aligns with the principles of the blue economy, it does not fully integrate the sustainability and innovation required to transform it into a comprehensive maritime strategy.

Simultaneously, the Sagarmala initiative, launched in 2016, focuses on port modernization, maritime infrastructure development, and improving coastal connectivity. This program positions India as a regional maritime hub while advancing its blue economy—promoting sectors such as marine tourism, renewable energy, and marine biotechnology (Louey, 2022). As Prime Minister Modi emphasized, "India is very sincere about growing in the maritime sector and emerging as a leading blue economy of the world." (Modi, 2021).

India's strategic approach recognizes that protecting its national interests and sustaining economic growth requires securing the strategic maritime space of the Indian and Indo-Pacific Oceans. This is achieved through a combination of deterrence measures, maritime security initiatives, and economic partnerships

that ensure stability while advancing India's influence in the region (Kratiuk et al., 2023).

Over the past decade, India has increasingly leveraged Indo-Pacific cooperation and multilateral frameworks as essential tools for addressing the challenges of the blue economy. Strategic initiatives in the Indo-Pacific include partnerships with Japan, Australia, and the United States through the Quad, focusing on the sustainable management of marine resources, securing shipping lanes, and addressing security threats such as piracy and maritime terrorism. (Smith-Godfrey, 2016).

India has also prioritized strengthening cooperation with ASEAN countries, particularly in fisheries management and marine environmental conservation, as part of a broader effort to counter China's assertive activities in the South China Sea. The Indo-Pacific concept is not new to ASEAN member states, as cooperation with the Pacific has long been prioritized through engagements with major powers that have vested interests in regional security and stability, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). The importance of the Indo-Pacific framework for ASEAN stems from the geographical positioning of its member states in Southeast Asia, situated at the transition point between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. As a result, the Indo-Pacific discourse is primarily shaped by the involvement of major economic and military powers. Proponents of the Indo-Pacific framework argue that the region's economic growth (de Estrada, 2019), alongside the increasing need for political and security cooperation, necessitates an expansion of regional collaboration (Endyka Triono Dachi et al., 2023).

India also collaborates with regional organizations like BIMSTEC, which includes nations such as Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Thailand. This platform enables India to strengthen maritime security cooperation, infrastructure development, and regional economic integration.

Beyond Asia, India has also sought to develop partnerships with African coastal nations, primarily to enhance fisheries and marine resource management while addressing the challenges of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. At the international level, India actively participates in initiatives such as UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea), the UN Clean Seas Program, and the Ocean Cleanup Mission, all of which aim to strengthen maritime governance and promote marine ecosystem conservation (Subhadarsani et al., 2024).

India's strategic approach places a strong emphasis on fostering partnerships based on shared values and mutual interests. By reinforcing its commitment to upholding freedom of navigation, combating maritime crime, and enhancing cooperative capabilities with ASEAN countries and other regional stakeholders, India positions itself as a responsible maritime power. Despite the Indo-Pacific's complex geopolitical landscape, India views the region as an opportunity to solidify its status as a leading maritime power, leveraging both economic and security-driven engagements to expand its influence.

Through initiatives like SAGAR, BIMSTEC, and the Quad, India seeks to reinforce its position as a regional maritime power. However, its Indo-Pacific

strategy extends beyond security concerns, recognizing the maritime domain as a driver of economic growth and sustainable development. This vision aligns with India's broader approach to the blue economy, which integrates marine resource management, infrastructure expansion, and ecological sustainability (Mistri & Mistry, 2023).

Under Modi's leadership, India has also pursued the goal of becoming a net security provider in the Indian Ocean, evident in initiatives like Project Mausam, which fosters cultural and economic ties with Indian Ocean nations. At the same time, India continues to enhance its naval capabilities and maritime diplomacy to ensure security and stability in critical sea lanes (Bhadauriya & Mishra, 2023).

India's strategic posture in the Indo-Pacific is underpinned by a comprehensive deterrence framework that integrates both conventional and unconventional military capabilities to address a broad spectrum of security challenges, ranging from nuclear threats to low-intensity conflicts. A crucial aspect of India's maritime strategy is the coordination among security forces to ensure a rapid and effective response to emerging threats in the region. This approach underscores India's recognition that safeguarding its national interests and sustaining economic growth necessitate the protection of strategic maritime spaces across the Indian and Indo-Pacific Oceans (Roy, 2019).

As part of this framework, in 2015, the Indian Navy published a new naval strategy that presents an innovative vision for the navy's role in national security. The foundation of this strategy dates back to 1998, when the Indian Navy issued a seminal document outlining its four key roles: sea-based deterrence, economic and energy security, forward presence, and maritime diplomacy. Following this framework, the Navy sought to elevate maritime awareness by establishing academic research institutes, funding scholarly research, and hosting conferences. A direct outcome of these initiatives was the publication of the Indian Naval Military Strategy in 2007 ('Net Security Provider' Defined: An Analysis of India's New Maritime Strategy-2015, 11.15).

The novelty of the 2015 strategy lies in its emphasis on diplomatic interests, marking a shift from a purely military naval strategy to a broader maritime security strategy. This evolution reflects a redefined vision of the navy—not merely as a military force but as a national instrument of influence. The Indian Navy underscores the strategic importance of India's dependence on the maritime domain, aligning with Prime Minister Modi's Act East policy, which seeks to strengthen ties with Indo-Pacific nations, particularly ASEAN countries, while positioning India as a key regional player (Subhadarsani et al., 2024). Within this framework, India's naval strategy emphasizes the establishment of robust deterrence and effective punitive capabilities. These deterrent forces must integrate both conventional and unconventional capabilities, viewing military power as a comprehensive tool to address a spectrum of threats, from nuclear deterrence to low-intensity conflicts. A key component of this strategy is fostering inter-organizational cooperation among security forces to ensure a rapid and effective response to maritime threats (Mistri & Mistry, 2023).

Thus, India's Blue Economy policy represents a significant opportunity to enhance the country's scientific, technological, economic, and diplomatic capacities under the Modi administration. By leveraging these capabilities, India seeks to maximize the sustainable use of its maritime resources, reinforcing its strategic and economic positioning in the Indo-Pacific.

Nevertheless, India's Indo-Pacific strategy faces challenges, including budgetary constraints, military capacity-building, and the need for long-term political commitment. The COVID-19 pandemic further complicated these efforts, disrupting global supply chains and impacting India's domestic economy. Moving forward, India's ability to sustain its strategic and economic engagement in the Indo-Pacific will depend on overcoming these obstacles while maintaining regional partnerships and fostering economic resilience.

INTERIM ASSESSMENT: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

This article examined the development of India's blue economy, analyzing recent changes, particularly under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The blue economy, which integrates the sustainable utilization of marine resources with economic development and ecological conservation, has been positioned not only as a driver of economic growth but also as a strategic tool for strengthening India's role in the international arena. In this context, the Indo-Pacific region, encompassing the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific, has become a central geopolitical and geostrategic arena where India seeks to assert leadership.

India has adopted a comprehensive policy for the development of the blue economy, emphasizing sectors such as the shipping industry, aquaculture, marine biotechnology, renewable energy, and marine tourism. These initiatives contribute not only to economic advancement but also to maritime security and India's broader regional and global positioning. The SAGAR initiative exemplifies India's ambition to integrate security and economic development within the Indo-Pacific framework.

However, despite these strategic advancements, India's blue economy remains a work in progress, facing significant hurdles. Persistent challenges—ranging from marine pollution, overfishing, and climate change to infrastructure limitations and geopolitical constraints—continue to limit its full potential. Additionally, while India has successfully established international partnerships, regional complexities, such as tensions with China and varying interests among Indo-Pacific stakeholders, complicate cooperative governance.

Looking ahead, India's success in translating its blue economy policies into tangible economic and environmental benefits will hinge on its ability to effectively navigate structural and geopolitical challenges. While initiatives such as SAGAR and multilateral collaborations underscore India's ambitions to become a key

maritime power, achieving long-term leadership in the blue economy will require sustained investments, adaptive policy frameworks, and strategic resilience. In this context, India's maritime vision extends beyond economic development; it aims to position the country as a regional power by integrating economic strategy with maritime security and international collaboration (Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Government of India, 2020). Future research should examine the role of emerging technologies, deep-sea resource development, and India's evolving position in climate governance in shaping the trajectory of its maritime strategy.

At present, India's blue economy initiatives are in various stages of implementation, with some encountering significant obstacles. While notable progress has been made, it remains too early to determine the overall success of these efforts. Ultimately, India's maritime strategy stands at a pivotal juncture, where its ability to balance economic growth, environmental sustainability, and regional stability will be crucial amid shifting geopolitical dynamics.

NOTES

- 1 Security and Growth for All in the Region initiative introduced by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015, is a vision that reflects India's maritime policy, aiming to strengthen maritime security and promote regional prosperity. See also: Kupriyanov, (2021).
- 2 The QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) is a strategic security framework comprising the United States, Japan, Australia, and India, aimed at promoting a free, open, and rules-based Indo-Pacific. Initially formed in 2004 for humanitarian cooperation, it evolved into a formal dialogue in 2007, later resuming in 2017 with a focus on non-traditional security challenges. While not a military alliance, the QUAD emphasizes cooperation on soft security issues, including transnational threats. For further reading, see Nakanishi (2023).
- 3 ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) is a regional organization with geopolitical and geoeconomic significance in the Indo-Pacific. Established in 1967, it now comprises ten member states and promotes peace, stability, and economic cooperation. ASEAN plays a key role in regional architecture through mechanisms like the East Asia Summit. Its *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific* (AOIP) emphasizes inclusivity, international law, and maritime cooperation. ASEAN's partnership with India, initiated in 1992, was elevated to a strategic level in 2002. For further reading, see Ishikawa, K. (2021).

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