

INDIA STRENGTHEN MARITIME SECURITY WITH OTHER NATIONS

India is strengthening maritime cooperation with other countries through joint naval exercises, information sharing and capacity-building initiatives. In 2026, initiatives such as **IOS SAGAR**, the **ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise (AIME-2026)** and **Exercise MILAN 2026** have highlighted India's commitment to a secure, stable and rules-based maritime order.

Why Is Maritime Security Important for India?

India's strategic location in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) makes maritime security essential for national security and economic growth. A significant share of India's trade and energy imports moves by sea.

Major maritime challenges include:

- **Piracy and armed robbery** against ships.
- **Maritime terrorism**, smuggling and human trafficking.
- **Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing**.
- **Strategic competition** and growing military activity in the Indian Ocean.
- Threats to shipping lanes, ports and undersea communication cables.

Key Initiatives to Strengthen Maritime Cooperation

1. Indian Ocean Ship (IOS) SAGAR

IOS SAGAR brings Indian naval personnel and personnel from friendly foreign countries together to train and sail aboard an Indian naval ship. The 2026 deployment involved personnel from 16 partner nations, promoting operational cooperation, maritime awareness and capacity-building.

2. ASEAN-India Maritime Exercise (AIME-2026)

The second edition of AIME commenced in September 2026 in Subic Bay, the Philippines. It promotes cooperation and interoperability between the Indian Navy and ASEAN maritime forces through professional exchanges and coordinated activities.

3. Exercise MILAN 2026

Hosted by the Indian Navy in Visakhapatnam, MILAN brought together naval forces and delegations from numerous countries. It focused on professional interaction, maritime cooperation and improving coordination during complex naval operations.

4. Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)

IONS provides a platform for Indian Ocean navies to discuss common maritime challenges, share best practices and build mutual trust. India assumed the chair of IONS in February 2026, providing an opportunity to advance regional maritime cooperation.

Significance for India

- **Safer trade routes:** Helps protect commercial shipping and energy supplies.
- **Improved maritime domain awareness:** Information sharing supports early detection of suspicious activities.
- **Stronger regional partnerships:** Builds trust with Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific countries.
- **Capacity-building:** Helps partner nations improve surveillance, search-and-rescue and maritime response capabilities.
- **Regional stability:** Encourages peaceful cooperation and respect for international maritime law.

Challenges and the Way Forward

Differences in national interests, limited capabilities among smaller maritime states, information-sharing concerns and strategic competition can restrict cooperation.

India should strengthen joint exercises, maritime information-sharing mechanisms, coastal surveillance and search-and-rescue coordination. Cooperation should also support freedom of navigation and the peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

UPSC Exam Relevance

- **Prelims:** IOS SAGAR, AIME, MILAN, IONS, IOR and UNCLOS.
- **Mains:** GS Paper II – India's neighbourhood and international relations; GS Paper

III – Security challenges and maritime security.

Possible UPSC Mains Question: *“Maritime security in the Indian Ocean requires cooperation among regional and extra-regional powers.” Discuss India’s initiatives and the challenges involved.*

Conclusion

India’s maritime partnerships reflect a shift towards **cooperative security rather than isolated naval action**. By strengthening regional capacity, sharing information and promoting a rules-based maritime order, India can protect its economic interests while contributing to peace and stability across the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific regions.

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Meta Description: Learn about India’s maritime security cooperation through IOS SAGAR, AIME-2026, MILAN and IONS, with key facts and UPSC Prelims and Mains relevance.

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