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## India's Project in Mauritius Faces Protests

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In 2015, India signed an agreement with Mauritius for development of Agalega Islands.

- The memorandum of understanding had provided for
  - setting up and upgradation of infrastructure for improving sea and air connectivity
  - enhancing capabilities of the Mauritian Defence Forces in safeguarding their interests in the Outer Island.
- However, since then, there have been growing reports over the Indian naval and coastguard's interests in setting up transponder systems and surveillance infrastructure, which has led to some local protests.

### Agalega Project

- The project includes the construction of a jetty, rebuilding, and extension of the runway, and building an airport terminal on Agalega Island which is situated north of mainland Mauritius.
- The \$87 million projects are funded by India.

### Importance of Project for India

- 95% of India's trade by volume and 68% of trade by value comes via the Indian Ocean. Nearly 80 % of India's crude oil requirement is imported by sea via the Indian Ocean. So presence in the Indian Ocean is of significance for India.
- To **counter China's 'String of Pearls'** which can prove to be a threat to our strategic interests, it became extremely necessary for us to have a presence in the larger Indian Ocean Region.
- The project can be seen as a part of India's efforts contribute in its neighbor's development stories under **SAGAR (Security And Growth for All in Region)**. The project can be seen as a way to increase cooperation between India and its neighbors.

- After facing resistance on India's project in the Maldives and on Assumption Island in Seychelles, it is extremely necessary for India to successfully implement its projects.
- The project will enhance the capabilities of Mauritius security forces through upgradation in its infrastructure.

## Reasons for Protest

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- **Protests from Opposition:**
  - Mauritius opposition has been raising concerns regarding transparency in the project.
  - There are issues over Indian involvement in the project and its costs and whether it would involve a military component.
  - The Mauritian government has exempted the project from any Environmental license process (EIA clearances).
- **Protests from local People:**
  - In 1965, before Mauritian independence, UK split the Chagos islands, from Mauritius, forcibly relocating the inhabitants and allowing the US to build a military base on Diego Garcia. Many Agalégans fear they could suffer a similar fate.
  - All major military powers like France, China, US, and the UK have naval bases in the Indian Ocean this is leading to fears that their peaceful island region will also be militarised.

## Way Forward

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Unlike the military bases run by other countries, the Indian bases are the soft base which means locals can move through any Indian-made project. So the local governments get more control over their domain, without diluting their sovereignty. Scholars suggest that India needs to project itself as a credible and long-term partner in a more persuasive manner by allaying the fears of all parties affected.