



Chinese Dual-Use Facilities Raise Security Concerns in India

For Prelims: Location of Coco Islands, Satellite ground station, Satellite tracking facilities

For Mains: China's military development in neighboring countries and causes of concerns for India

Why in News?

Recent satellite images showing the construction of a **military facility on Coco Islands in Myanmar and a proposed remote satellite receiving ground station system in Sri Lanka**, both coming up with Chinese help, have raised concerns in India of possible surveillance across the region.

What are the Causes of Concern?

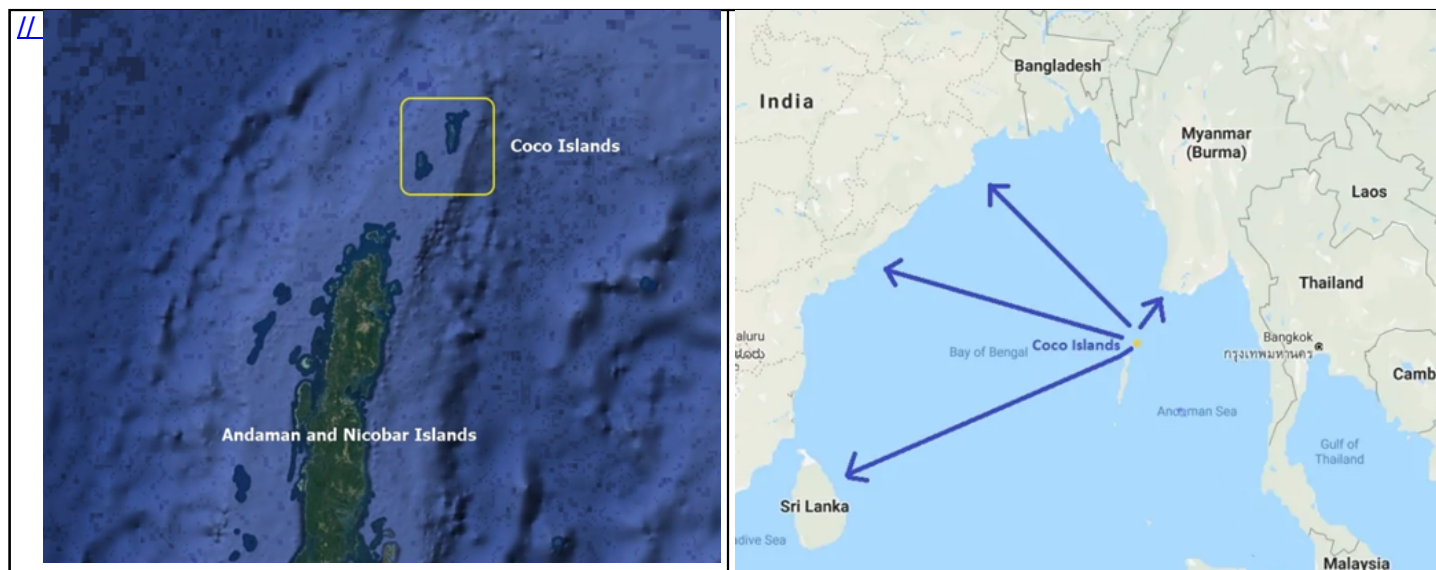
- **Coco Islands of Myanmar** located very close to India's Andaman and Nicobar Island chain are strategically important for India.
 - China, which has been eyeing to encircle India in the Indian Ocean Region with its aggressive '**String of Pearls**' policy is developing a military facility on the islands.
 - The island is being connected to the southern landmass using a new bridge which can anytime be used by the Chinese military.
- Because of its critical location, the proposed remote satellite receiving ground station in Sri Lanka **can be used to spy on Indian assets and intercept sensitive information** across the region.
 - **Satellite tracking facilities are inherently dual-use in nature** which means they can be used for both civil and military activities.
 - It's also apprehended that **India's satellite launch facilities in Sriharikota and the missile test range in Odisha could come under the scanner of the ground station** and launches from there could be tracked to obtain sensitive data.
 - Ground stations are surface-based facilities which are designed to provide real-time communication with satellites.
- Recently, a Chinese ship was seen docking at **Hambantota port in Sri Lanka**, the forementioned stations are likely to work in coordination with such vessels to gather vital information in the region.

What are the Other Instances that Raise Doubts on China's Intentions?

- In August 2022, the docking of Chinese spy ship '**Yuan Wang-5**' at Hambantota created a major diplomatic showdown between India and Sri Lanka.
- Later in November, another vessel 'Yuan Wang-6' had entered the **Indian Ocean Region**, coinciding with a planned Indian long-range missile launch.
 - At that time, the launch was deferred, and the vessel had re-entered the IOR in December when the missile test was rescheduled.

Where are the Coco Islands located?

- The Coco Islands are in the **north-eastern Bay of Bengal**. They are part of Yangon region of Myanmar. These islands are situated very close to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.



What is China's "String of Pearls" Strategy?

- The **"String of Pearls"** is a geopolitical theory that refers to China's increasing efforts to develop and expand its ports and naval bases throughout the Indian Ocean region, from the Strait of Malacca to the Horn of Africa.
- The **theory suggests that China is seeking to establish a series of strategic naval bases and commercial ports along key sea-lanes in the Indian Ocean**, to protect its vital energy imports and enhance its maritime influence.
- These "pearls" include ports such as Gwadar in Pakistan, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, and Djibouti in Africa, which provide China with greater access and influence in the region.
- Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), sometimes referred to as the New Silk Road is another infrastructure project by China. It is also seen as part of China's **debt trap diplomacy**.

What is India doing to Counter China?

- **"Necklace of Diamonds" Strategy:** This strategy aims at garlanding China or in simple words, the counter encirclement strategy. India is expanding its naval bases and is also improving relations with strategically placed countries to counter China's strategies. India's strategic bases are:
 - **Chabahar port** - Iran
 - Sabang port - Indonesia
 - **Sittwe port** - Myanmar
 - Mongla port - Bangladesh
 - Changi naval base - Singapore
- **Forming groups with Like-minded Nations:** India has made agreements for military cooperation in the region with Japan, Australia and the USA. The four countries carry out joint military exercises in the IOR region and are known as the **'Quad'**.
- **Building Coastal Radar Networks:** India is installing coastal systems in the countries in Indian Ocean region such as Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Maldives, Seychelles and Bangladesh. These radars will relay live images, videos, and location information of Ships moving in the Indian Ocean Region.
 - The project is implemented by **Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL)**.
- **Act East Policy:** This was launched as an effort to integrate India's economy with South-East Asian nations. It has been used to make important military and strategic agreements with Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Thailand helping India to counter China.
- **Military and Naval Relationships:** To upgrade and train its navy, India has developed a strategic naval relationship with Myanmar which gives India an increased footprint in the area.

- **Strategic Investments:** India has invested a lot diplomatically in countries like Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Mongolia - all surrounding China. It also has recently extended over USD 1.75 billion in grants and credit to Myanmar.

Way Forward

- **Increase Naval Capabilities:** India must enhance its naval capabilities by incorporating more and more vessels and submarines. India's naval capabilities are limited, particularly in terms of the number of warships and submarines it possesses. This limits India's ability to patrol and secure its maritime borders and project its naval power in the Indian Ocean region.
- **Enhance the Investment in other countries:** India has tried countering China through diplomatic investments, but it needs to enhance these investments as China is way ahead of India in making such investments. India's investments look miniscule before China.
- **Economic Competition:** Along with all other steps, India must focus on economic growth to project itself as an alternative to China in global economy. [Aatmanirbhar Bharat abhiyan](#) has been a good initiative towards this.
- **Technological Advancements:** China is investing heavily in developing advanced technologies such as [artificial intelligence](#), [quantum computing](#), and [5G](#) networks. India needs to match these investments to stay ahead of China in the technological race and ensure its own security and economic development.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Questions (PYQ)

Mains

Q. What do you understand by 'The String of Pearls'? How does it impact India? Briefly outline the steps taken by India to counter this. **(2013)**

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