



## Indian Base in Mauritius' Agalega Islands

### Why in News

Recently, Mauritius has denied a report that it has allowed **India to build a military base on the remote island of Agalega.**

- Earlier it was reported by a news broadcaster that an **airstrip and two jetties to house an Indian military base on Agalega island is under construction.**



### Key Points

- **Background:**
  - In 2015, India signed an agreement with Mauritius for development of Agalega Islands.
    - It 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.
- **Agelega Project:**
  - Agelega project includes **the construction of a jetty, rebuilding, and extension of**

**the runway, and building an airport terminal** on Agalega Island.

- The USD 87 million projects are funded by India.
- The project would add a new airport, port and logistics and communication facilities and potentially any other facilities related to the project.
- The Agelega island is located in the **southwestern Indian Ocean**, 1,122 km north of Mauritius.

- It has a total land area of 27 square miles (70 square km).

▪ **Significance:**

◦ **Strengthen India's Presence:**

- It will strengthen India's presence in the south-west Indian Ocean and **facilitate its power launch aspirations in the region.**
- India considers the new base **necessary to facilitate both air and surface maritime patrols** in the south-west Indian Ocean and as an intelligence post.

◦ **Geo-Economic:**

- As a **“central geographic point”** Mauritius holds importance for commerce and connectivity in the Indian Ocean.
- As a member of the [African Union, Indian Ocean Rim Association](#) and the Indian Ocean Commission, Mauritius is a stepping stone to multiple geographies.
- As a founding-member of the [‘Small Island Developing States’](#) (SIDS) it has been seen as a significant neighbour.

◦ **Protect Foreign Trade:**

- **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.

◦ **Countering China:**

- 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.](#)

◦ **Security And Growth for All in Region:**

- The project can be seen as a part of India’s efforts to contribute to 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.

◦ **Enhancing Security infrastructure of Mauritius:**

- The project will **enhance the capabilities of Mauritius security forces** through upgradation in its infrastructure.

▪ **Challenges:**

◦ **Protests from Opposition:**

- Mauritius opposition has been raising **concerns regarding transparency in the project.**
- The Mauritian government has **exempted the project from any Environmental license process (EIA clearances).**

◦ **Protests from local People:**

- In 1965, before Mauritian independence, the UK split the Chagos islands from Mauritius, forcibly relocating the inhabitants.. 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.**
- **China Centric Policies:**
  - China's rapidly **growing presence in the northern part of the Indian Ocean** along with the deployment of Chinese submarines and ships in the region is a challenge for India.
- **Obsessive Security Policy:**
  - An obsessively security-driven policy of India towards its neighbours has not helped in the past.
  - Certain **common challenges** like [climate change](#), sustainable development and the [blue economy](#) should be **reconsidered in India's approach to Mauritius.**
- **Other Recent Developments:**
  - In July 2021, Prime Ministers of India and Mauritius jointly [inaugurated a Supreme Court building](#) in Mauritius.
  - In February 2021, the Union Cabinet approved signing of the [Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement \(CECPA\)](#) between India and Mauritius.
  - India and Mauritius signed a **USD 100 million Defence Line of Credit** agreement
  - Mauritius would get a Dornier aircraft and an [Advanced Light Helicopter Dhruv](#) on lease which would build its maritime security capabilities.
  - The two sides also discussed the [Chagos Archipelago](#) dispute, which was an issue of sovereignty and sustainable development before the [United Nations \(UN\)](#).
    - In 2019, **India voted at the UN General Assembly in support of the Mauritian** position on the issue. India was one of the 116 countries that voted demanding that the UK end its "colonial administration" from the group of islands.
  - India [delivered 1,00,000 Covishield vaccines](#) to Mauritius.

## Way Forward

- 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.
- 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.
- Companies registered in Mauritius are the largest source of [Foreign Direct Investment \(FDI\)](#) into India, making it **crucial for India to upgrade its bilateral tax treaty, adopting the latest international practices** that prevent multinational companies from artificially shifting profits to low tax countries.
- As India takes an integrated view of its security cooperation in the south western Indian Ocean, **Mauritius is the natural node for it.** Therefore, it is important to take course-corrections in India's [Neighbourhood First policy](#).

[Source: TH](#)