



India Maritime Heritage Conclave 2024

For Prelims: [National Maritime Heritage Complex](#), [Indus Valley civilization](#), [Royal Indian Navy](#), [Navy Day](#), [Sagar Mala Program](#)

For Mains: India's Maritime History and Contributions to Global Trade, Challenges in India's Maritime Sector, India's Maritime Initiatives

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Why in News?

Recently, the **1st India Maritime Heritage Conclave (IMHC 2024)** was organized by the [Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways](#), celebrating [India's maritime legacy](#) and contributions to global trade, while discussing future innovations.

What are the Key Highlights of the IMHC 2024?

- **Theme:** *"Towards Understanding India's Position in Global Maritime History."*
 - Focused on India's historical and contemporary contributions to global maritime trade, culture, and innovation.
- **Key Highlights:** stalls at the conclave exhibited India's maritime legacy, showcasing ancient shipbuilding techniques and navigational tools, reflecting India's historical connection to global trade networks.
 - Leading maritime nations like Greece, Italy, and the United Kingdom participated, emphasizing the global significance of India's maritime heritage.
 - A key highlight was the emphasis on the upcoming [National Maritime Heritage Complex \(NMHC\) in Lothal](#), which will showcase India's ancient maritime techniques, such as shipbuilding and bead-making.

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Objectives:



1

Showcase at one place entire India's Maritime Legacy:

- Highlight India's advancements in shipbuilding, navigation, and maritime trade.

2

Global Cultural Confluence:

- Trace cultural, religious, and economic confluence between India and Southeast Asia, Far East Asia, West Asia, the Mediterranean, Africa, Europe and beyond.

3

Technological Evolution:

- Explore India's contributions to maritime technology, from ancient times through various cultural phases till date.

4

Spiritual and Cultural Exchange:

- Discuss India's role in spreading philosophies and practices through maritime routes.

5

Maritime Heritage Preservation:

- Raise awareness about the conservation of maritime archaeological sites, monuments artefacts, ancient ports, lighthouses etc.

National Maritime Heritage Complex (NMHC)

- The **NMHC** is being built in **Lothal, Gujarat**, a historic [Indus Valley civilization\(IVC\)](#) site, under the **Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways**.
 - The NMHC project aims to become **one of the world's largest maritime complexes**, integrating past, present, and future maritime activities into a world-class facility.
- The NMHC project will feature a museum with 14 galleries, Lothal Town, an Open Aquatic Gallery, Lighthouse Museum, Coastal State Pavilions, eco resorts, theme parks, and a maritime research institute.



Cabinet Decision: 09th October, 2024

National Maritime Heritage Complex, Lothal

Cabinet approves development of National Maritime Heritage Complex (NMHC) at Lothal, Gujarat



- Construction of Light House Museum under Phase 1B at a cost of Rs. 266.11 crore will be funded by Directorate General of Lighthouses and Lightships
- Project will create 15,000 direct employment and 7,000 indirect employment
- NMHC will immensely help local communities, tourists and visitors, researchers and scholars, government bodies, educational institutions, cultural organisations, environment and conservation groups, businesses

What is India's Maritime History?

▪ Ancient India:

- **Indus Valley Civilization (IVC) (3300-1300 BCE)** : The origins of India's maritime activities can be traced to the [IVC](#).
 - **Lothal's dry-dock (2400 BC)** is the **world's first known dry-dock**, reflecting advanced nautical knowledge.
 - Evidence indicates robust trade between the **Indus Valley and Mesopotamia**.
 - The discovery of **Harappan seals and jewelry in Mesopotamia** underscores this extensive exchange between the two ancient civilizations.
- **Vedic Era (1500 - 600 BC):** [Vedic literature](#), including the Rig Veda, mentions boats

and sea voyages, with Varuna, the Lord of the Sea, guiding maritime routes.

- The [Ramayana](#) and [Mahabharata](#) describe shipbuilding and sea travel.
- **Nandas and Mauryas (500 - 200 BC):** The [Magadh kingdom's](#) navy is the first ever recorded instance of a navy anywhere in the world.
 - [Chanakya](#), the advisor to the first Mauryan emperor, [Chandragupta Maurya](#), detailed a waterways department led by a [Navadhyaksha \(Superintendent of Ships\)](#) in his [Arthashastra](#).
 - **Emperor Ashoka** used maritime routes to spread [Buddhism](#) to Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka, further enriching India's cultural and religious influence.
- **Satavahana Dynasty (200 BC-220 AD):** The **Satavahanas** controlled India's East coast, trading with the Roman Empire.
 - They were the **first native Indian rulers to issue coins inscribed with ships**.
- **Gupta Empire (320-550 AD):** The [Gupta Dynasty](#) marked India's Golden Age, with prosperity, cultural growth, and advancements in astronomy and navigation, as noted by Chinese travelers [Fa-Hien](#) and [Huein Tsang](#).
 - Astronomical advancements by [Aryabhata](#) and [Varahamihira](#) improved oceanic navigation, enabling precise voyages. The opening of several ports revived maritime trade with Europe and Africa.
- **Southern Dynasties:**
 - **Cholas (3rd-13th century):** Extensive maritime trade with Sumatra, Java, Thailand, China. Built harbors, shipyards, lighthouses.
 - **Pandyas:** Controlled pearl farming and traded with Rome and Egypt.
 - **Cheras (12th Century):** They traded with the **Greeks and Romans**, using monsoon winds to sail from **Tyndis (near Kochi) and Muziris (near Kochi) to Arabian ports**.
- **Medieval India:**
 - **Arabs:** By the **8th century**, Arabs emerged as prominent maritime traders, acting as intermediaries between India, Southeast Asia, and Europe.
 - Their influence marked a shift in the control of [Indian Ocean](#) trade routes.
 - **Portuguese:** In the **16th century**, **Vasco da Gama (1460-1524)** discovered an oceanic route from Portugal to India; he rounded the [Cape of Good Hope](#) in Africa to arrive at **Calicut in Kerala in May 1498**.
 - His arrival marked a new chapter in India's maritime history, disrupting the peaceful trade dominated by coastal and seafaring communities from East Africa to Malaysia and the [Indonesian Islands](#).
 - The **Zamorins of Calicut**, a major trading port, had flourishing trade over land and sea.
 - The Portuguese sought to monopolize trade by establishing strongholds in [Goa](#), and **Cochin**.
 - **European Competition in Indian Waters:** The 17th century witnessed fierce competition among European powers, including the Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British, for dominance over Indian maritime trade.
 - The [British East India Company](#) gradually gained supremacy by securing trade privileges and leveraging naval power to dominate Indian waters.
- **Pre- Independence:**
 - **Maratha Naval Resistance:** [Shivaji Maharaj](#) built a strong navy to counter European and Mughal influence along the western coast. Coastal forts like [Sindhudurg and Vijaydurg](#) strengthened maritime defenses.
 - **Maritime India Under The British Raj:** The **Royal Indian Marine (RIM)** was formed in 1892 and later renamed [Royal Indian Navy \(RIN\)](#) in 1934.
 - During [World Wars I and II](#), the RIN played a significant role in escort missions, patrolling, and combined operations in the Middle East, Burma, and the Mediterranean.
 - The British Crown formally renamed the naval force as the **Royal Indian Navy in 1934**, laying the groundwork for its post-independence transformation.
- **Post-Independence Era (1947 - Present):** With independence, the Royal Indian Navy was divided between India and Pakistan. In 1950, the prefix "Royal" was dropped, and the [Indian Navy](#) was established with the [Ashoka Lion](#) as its [emblem](#).
 - The motto **Sam no Varunah** ("Be auspicious unto us, Oh Varuna") reflects the

Navy's cultural and historical roots.

- **Vice Admiral R.D. Katari** became the [first Indian Chief of Naval Staff](#) in 1958.
- The Navy played a pivotal role in the 1971 India-Pakistan war. **Navy Day**, celebrated on **4th December since 1972**, honors the success of [Operation Trident](#) (1971 Indo-Pak war naval actions).
- The Indian Navy has **three Commands**, each under the control of a **Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief** namely, **The Western (HQ- Mumbai)**, **Eastern (Visakhapatnam)** and **Southern Naval Command (Kochi)**.
- Modernization efforts have transformed the **Indian Navy into a blue-water force** with capabilities extending beyond the **Indian Ocean region**.

What is the Significance of India's Maritime Sector?

▪ Status of India's Maritime Sector:

- India ranks as the **16th largest maritime** country globally.
- India is the **world's 3rd largest ship** recycler by tonnage, holding a **30% global market share** in ship-breaking with the world's largest ship-breaking facility located in Alang, Gujarat.

▪ Economic Importance: India's maritime sector serves as the backbone of its trade and commerce, **handling around 95% of the country's trade by volume and 70% by value.**

- Indian ports handle approximately **1,200 million tonnes of cargo annually**, underscoring the sector's economic significance..
- According to the [World Bank's 2023 Logistic Performance Index \(LPI\) Report](#), India ranks **22nd globally** in the "International Shipments" category, a significant rise from **44th in 2014**.
 - This improvement underscores the **performance of Indian ports, which have outperformed global peers** on operational parameters such as container turnaround time and dwell time.
- Ports support Exports-Imports, international trade, coastal shipping, and cruise shipping.
- With the **global blue economy** expected to reach **USD 6 trillion by 2030**, India's maritime sector is set to significantly contribute to the country's rise as the **world's third-largest economy**.

Major Ports in India



- Ports in India are classified as **Major** and **Minor Ports** according to the jurisdiction of the Central and State government as defined under the **Indian Ports Act, 1908** i.e. Major Ports are owned and managed by the Central Government and Minor ports are owned and managed by the State Governments.
- The **Major Port Authorities Act, 2021** provides for regulation, operation and planning of major ports in India and provide greater autonomy to these ports. It replaced the Major Port Trusts Act, 1963.
- There are **12 major ports**. **13th Major Port** (under construction) is **Vadhavan port, Maharashtra**.

What are the Key Challenges in India's Maritime Sector?

- **Port Capacity:** India's ports have a limited capacity to handle the increasing volume of cargo.
 - The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways reported that despite having **13 major ports** and **over 200 non-major ports**, many are operating at or near full capacity, leading to congestion and delays.
- **Complex Regulations:** The maritime sector encounters challenges from overlapping regulations by bodies such as the **Directorate General of Shipping, Maritime States Development Council**, and **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**, hindering operational efficiency..
 - Challenges include **illegal fishing, unsustainable resource exploitation**, and the **need for better regulatory implementation** to protect marine habitats and biodiversity.
- **Naval Expansion and Indigenisation:** While India aims to build a 175-ship navy by 2035, the **pace of construction and budget constraints** lag behind strategic needs, especially compared to China's rapid shipbuilding.
 - India faces a shortfall in submarines, with **delays in projects like Project 75-I** and the need for indigenous nuclear attack submarines.
- **Coastal Security:** India's vast and porous coastline is vulnerable to illegal landings of arms and

explosives by terror groups and drug syndicates.

- **Notable cases include the [1993 Mumbai blasts](#) and the [26/11 Mumbai terror attack](#)**, highlighting significant security gaps.

India's Initiatives Related to Maritime Sector:

- [Ship Repair and Recycling Mission](#)
- [International Maritime Dispute Resolution Centre](#)
- [Security and Growth for All in the Region \(SAGAR\)](#)
- [Sagar Mala Program](#)
- [Maritime India Vision 2030](#)
- [Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047](#)

Way Forward

- **Promoting Maritime Tourism:** Developing **coastal tourism initiatives** like **Development of Coastal Circuits** under [Swadesh Darshan Scheme](#) of the **Ministry of Tourism** can enhance local economies while preserving cultural heritage.
 - India is advancing its blue economy by focusing on sustainable ocean resource use to drive economic growth and job creation.
- **Enhancing Skill Development:** Establishing **training programs in maritime skills** can empower local communities and create job opportunities.
 - Collaborating with [international maritime institutions](#) can facilitate knowledge transfer and innovation.
- **Green Shipping Practices:** India is dedicated to sustainable maritime operations, exemplified by the [Green Tug Transition Program](#) and [Green Hydrogen Hubs](#) at key ports.
 - Developing **smart ports** and **eco-friendly tugboats** is key to India's maritime vision, enhancing efficiency and reducing the industry's environmental impact.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Invest in **upgrading ports and shipping infrastructure** to boost efficiency and capacity, while also improving connectivity between coastal areas and inland markets to enhance trade.
 - The visionary [Sagar Mala programme](#) integrates **ports with industrial clusters**, optimizes logistics networks, and promotes comprehensive coastal development.
- **Policy Framework:** Formulate **integrated policies** that combine maritime heritage preservation with **economic development objectives**, while ensuring compliance with international maritime laws and agreements to foster global cooperation.
 - The [Coastal Shipping Bill 2024](#) streamlines regulatory frameworks and enhances multi-modal trade connectivity.

Drishti Mains Question

Analyze the significance of India's maritime heritage as highlighted in the India Maritime Heritage Conclave 2024.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q1. Which one of the following ancient towns is well known for its elaborate system of water harvesting and management by building a series of dams and channelizing water into connected reservoirs? (2021)

(a) Dholavira

(b) Kalibangan

(c) Rakhigarhi

(d) Ropar

Ans: (a)

Q2. Which of the following characterizes/characterize the people of Indus Civilization? (2013)

1. They possessed great palaces and temples.
2. They worshipped both male and female deities.
3. They employed horse-drawn chariots in warfare.

Select the correct statement/statements using the codes given below:

(a) 1 and 2 only

(b) 2 only

(c) 1, 2 and 3

(d) None of the statements given above is correct

Ans: (b)

Q3. Which one of the following is not a Harappan site? (2019)

(a) Chanhudaro

(b) Kot Diji

(c) Sohgaora

(d) Desalpur

Ans: (c)

Mains

Q.With respect to the South China sea, maritime territorial disputes and rising tension affirm the need for safeguarding maritime security to ensure freedom of navigation and overflight throughout the region. In this context, discuss the bilateral issues between India and China. **(2014)**