

## The Indian Aircraft Carrier Program – Strategies For 2024 and Beyond

**By Commodore CP Srivastava (Retd)**

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1. There have been three long term, significant and welcoming decisions by MoD, in the nation's maritime domain, which would drive the navy's vision of an 'aircraft carrier centric fleet structure'. The first is the approval to construct the second Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC 2), similar in design and capabilities to the 40,000-ton INS Vikrant, IAC 1. The second decision is to continue with the ongoing work on the design and development of the next generation 65,000-ton Vishal Class aircraft carrier. The third decision is to continue with the development of the indigenous Nuclear Attack Submarines, SSN's, under Project 75 Alpha, thereby putting to rest the 'either Aircraft Carrier or SSN' debate. These decisions are poised to positively influence the indigenous aircraft carrier program, well into the next decade and even beyond.

### **IAC2- SISTER SHIP OF THE INS VIKRANT CLASS**

2. The decision to approve the construction of IAC 2 as a sister ship of the 40,000-ton INS Vikrant, is a commercially sound and operationally pragmatic. This will essentially keep the yard infrastructure and workforce active and augment the nascent and fragile vendor eco system. It will also ensure that the platform is delivered within about 7 years and therefore, by 2030, the Indian Navy will have a minimum of two carriers available for deployment.

### **Need for A Third Carrier of the Vikrant Class**

3. The prevalent Indian maritime doctrine envisages a three-carrier fleet structure. This ensures that IN can simultaneously deploy two Carrier Battle Groups, CBG's, one each on the Eastern and western seaboard. However, the current geopolitical realities and its predicted trajectory, merits a recalibration of our maritime strategies. We may need to consider the possibility of a third battle ground, the 'south Indian Ocean'. This may, in fact, be the crucial 'killing ground' of the next Sino- India conflict, or a US-Sino-Taiwan standoff.

4. **Indian Ocean- China's Achilles Heel.** 90% of China's crude oil requirement is transported via sea route. Of this, about 60 % is sourced from the Persian Gulf and remaining 40 % from Africa and Brazil. During the period Dec 22 to Nov 23, about 515 million barrels crude, bound for China transited through the Indian Ocean, south of India and Sri Lanka. This translates to around 100 plus China- bound large tankers, transiting the Indian ocean every day. Add to this the non- fossil fuel traffic of primarily, food grain, soya bean (crucial for animal feed), raw material and finished goods, the traffic may be as high as roughly 200 China -bound ships transiting thru the Indian Ocean, south of the Indian peninsula, every day. In all future conflict, these 200 odd ships would be the 'prize to be threatened, disrupted, captured or sunk'.

5. India's Southern Seaboard- An Emerging Geo-Strategic Reality. The Navy would therefore need to deploy adequate assets on the 'Southern Seaboard'. This new 'battlefield' may be as far south as 300 to 500 NM of the traditional shipping routes, south of Sri Lanka. At such large distances from the mainland, only a Carrier Battle Group can provide the operational and combat capability which is 'credible and sustainable. Since the existing two CBG's would continue to operate on the western and eastern seaboard, this emerging geopolitical reality dictates the requirement for a third CBG.

6. IAC 3- Proposed Third Carrier of the Vikrant Class. It may therefore be prudent for the defence planners to bite the bullet and approve construction of the IAC 3, as the third sister ship of the Vikrant. The commercial advantages of a three- ship IAC order on Cochin Shipyard, will be substantial. Further, such a program would provide a massive fillip to the indigenous defence manufacturing industry. More importantly, an early decision would provide the Indian Navy with an operational capability of 'strategic significance'.

### **THE PROPOSED 65000 TON VISHAL CLASS- A NEXT-GEN AIRCRAFT CARRIER**

7. Along with the decision to construct 'at least' one more carrier of the 45000 ton Vikrant class, the MoD has also indicated that the work on the design and construction of the next gen, 65000 ton Vishal Class carrier, would continue. There are major technical and operational advantages of a larger 65,000-ton carrier vis a vis the 45000 ton Vikrant class. Some of the critical design and operational limitations, which stem from the size and displacement of an air carrier, are enumerated in the succeeding paragraphs.

#### **Aircraft Launch and Recovery System**

8. STOBAR Vs CATOBAR Aircraft Launch and Recovery System. INS Vikramaditya and INS Vikrant, being of similar deck length and displacement, about 230 mts and 40,000 ton, respectively, have a ski jump and use the 'Short Take-off But Arrested Recovery (STOBAR) aircraft launch and recovery system. The STOBAR system, however, does not permit operations of heavier aircraft such as fixed wing Air Early Warning and Control, AEWAC's and Anti Surface strike & Anti-Submarine Warfare aircraft (ASW). The under-design Vishal Class, on the other hand, will have a longer and through- deck design (approx. 300 mts long, with no ski jump) and will displace about 65,000 to 70,000 tons. This will permit the contemporary Catapult Assisted Take Off But Arrested Recovery System (CATOBAR), for launch and recovery of aircraft. This system traditionally uses a steam operated catapult to launch the aircraft and an 'aircraft tail hook- on deck arrester wire' recovery system.

9. The more contemporary and modern CATOBAR systems use the lighter, compact, and more efficient Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System, EMALS, instead for the steam catapult. The proposed Vishal class will have the EMALS and arrested wire recovery system. This will permit launch of heavier twin engine fighters, fixed wing Anti-Submarine Warfare/ Air Early Warning, ASW/ AEW aircrafts, as well as deck launched Unmanned Air Vehicles/Unmanned Combat Air Vehicles, UAV/UCAVs, and drones.

#### **Types of Aircraft and Size of Air Wing**

10. Limitations of Size- 45000 Ton Vikrant Class. The Vikrant Class has an air wing of about 36 airframes. This consists of 24 Fixed wing, (Mig 29 K/ Rafale, Naval Tejas) and 12 rotary wing air frames (a combination of the Russian Kamov 31, the US MH 60 R and indigenous Advanced Light Helicopter, ALH). However, on an average, 70 % of its air assets will be deployed for own air defense. Many therefore, consider the 45000-ton, Vikrant Class carrier as an 'Air defense carrier', with limited 'air early warning, control, and surveillance' (AEWACS) capability and only a 'lean and slender' power projection capacity. Since STOBAR does not permit operations of fixed wing AEWAC's and Anti Surface strike & Anti-Submarine aircraft (ASW), these functions are then performed by lighter, slower, and less capable rotatory wing aircraft.

The follow-on sister ships of the Vikrant Class (IAC2 and beyond) however, may provide some surveillance, air early warning and limited cargo deliver capability by deploying small to mid-size deck-launched UAV's.

11. The Next Gen Aircraft Carrier- 65000 Ton Vishal Class. The 65, 000 to 70,000 ton under design Vishal Class, will have a longer deck (approx. 300 mts) and more hanger space. It will have an air wing of about 35 fixed wing and 20 rotary wing airframes. These would include twin-engine high-performance fighters, fixed wing AEW/ASW aircrafts and advanced autonomous UAV's/UCAV's/drones for surveillance, strike and cargo carrying. Its ability to provide air cover to the CBG and also project power to influence battle ashore, will therefore be substantial.

### **Smaller Carriers- Limited Financial Savings and Reduced Ops Capability**

12. Comparison of the US Ford-class and French Navy Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier (loosely comparable to INS Vikramaditya and INS Vikrant), shows that smaller carriers provide only a fraction of financial savings, approximately 22%, but at 'extreme costs' in terms of reduced operational capabilities; a 53% decrease in embarked aircraft, 225% less aviation fuel storage, and 383% less munitions storage. While theoretically the Navy could make up for the reduced ops capability by deploying more of these smaller carriers, unfortunately, operational capabilities do not scale linearly. Therefore, two 40000-ton Vikrant Class cannot replace a 65000-ton Vishal class.

### **Countering Adversary's Anti Access and Area Denial Threat**

13. The Anti Access and Area Denial Threat. The most potent threat to aircraft carriers is posed by the enemy's Anti Access and Area Denial, A2/ AD capability. In simple terms, Anti Access (A2) is the action/capability to build the 'wall' to prevent or defer enemy power projection assets from reaching their 'weapon release line'. Anti Denial (AD), on the other hand, is the intervention required to neutralize the assets once the A2 wall is breached. A2 assets generally consist of long range, land based Anti-Ship Ballistic Missiles, ASBM (the 1500km Chinese DF- 21D) and anti-ship missile armed aircraft. These however need to be supported with a long-range surveillance and target tracking network, a precision weapon guidance network, consisting of Low Orbit Satellites (LOS) and Over the Horizon Radars, and finally a robust 'Command, Control and Communication' network; to sew all these together. Anti Denial (AD) asset, against a CBG, are primarily submarine launched Anti-ship missiles (SLAM's).

14. Mitigating A2/ AD Threats to the CBG. The most effective counter to enemy A2/AD threat is the Carrier Group's own robust, comprehensive, and more importantly, organic, A2/ AD assets. The CBG should therefore have suitable resources to 'erect' its own A2 wall, to prevent ingress of enemy asset, and adequate AD wherewithal to neutralize those enemy platforms which penetrate the Wall, or any weapons launched at the CBG.

15. Anti A2/AD and Power Projection Capabilities- Vishal Class Large Aircraft Carriers. A Carrier Battle Group, attempting to project power on a distant enemy coast, would be centred around a Vishal Class, 65000-ton carrier. Other components of the CBG would include diverse types of multi role surface combatants and in-support SSN's, nuclear attack submarines. In addition, there would be space-based assets assigned to the CBG, in the form of either, a Low Orbit satellites (LOS), or a High-Altitude Pseudo Satellite, HAPS. The Carrier's air wing would comprise of deck operated long range surveillance UAV's, high performance multi role combat and strike aircraft and fixed /rotary wing AEW and ASW aircrafts. These, coupled with the under development Next Generation Destroyers, NGD (with a 144 plus diverse extended-range missile inventory), would provide the CBG with the stand-off range to operate outside or at the fringes of the enemies A2/AD arc, and influence the battle ashore.

### **Deployment Pattern- Medium size Vikrant Class and Larger Vishal Class CBG's**

16. Therefore, for force projection in an aggressive and omnipresent A2/AD threat environment, large aircraft carrier, such as the 65000-ton Vishal Class, remains the only option.

17. However, in areas where the A2/AD environment is less demanding, and their ops area is within range of our land based air assets (Western, Eastern and now emerging Southern sea boards), a CBG centred around the Vikrant Class, would provide the forces at sea with the ability to monitor and control the sea lanes of communications and deny the enemy freedom to conduct maritime operations, in our areas of interest.

### **APPROVAL OF THIRD AIRCRAFT CARRIER WITHOUT IMPACTING ONGOING SSN AND OTHER PROJECTS**

18. The third decision of significance was the MoD's approval to construct the follow-on of INS Vikrant, IAC2 and continue with the larger Vishal Class, without impacting the ongoing program to construct six Nuclear Attack Submarines, SSNs, under Project 75 Alpha. Unfortunately, in 2021, the then CDS advised the Government that SSN Program takes precedence over the third Aircraft Carrier and the IAC2 program should be kept on hold.

19. Aircraft Carriers Vs SSN. Comparing carriers and SSNs is like comparing oranges and apples. The roles of the two platforms are entirely different, with only a minor overlap of capability-SSNs too can launch a limited number of land attack missiles. Luckily prudence and strategic maturity prevailed and the defence planners approved the third aircraft carrier with no linkages to the ongoing SSN program. This decision has put to rest, hopefully in perpetuity, the irrational hypothesis- 'EITHER Aircraft Carrier OR SSN'.

### **CONCLUSION**

20. The aircraft carrier can transport an air wing's strike capability across the world's oceans—three-quarters of the Earth's surface. It can deliver air power without the need for diplomatic arrangements of land-based alternatives. This provides the military and political leaders with valuable options for responding to both, region as well as out of area crises. The current and evolving geo-strategic calculus prophesies a likely scenario wherein the Indian Navy would require the capability to deploy three CBG's simultaneously; in the western, eastern, and southern seaboard. In addition, as our global aspirations, influence and responsibilities proliferate, the Navy will be called upon to project power and to influence events ashore, even in distant battlefields.

21. An assured IAC program of say, three carriers of Vikrant Class, in addition to meeting the operational requirement of having a three- CBG deployment capability, has many economic, social, and intellectual spin off. These would include job creation, skill development, infrastructure development, creation of a vibrant Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises, MSME, eco system and providing impetus to the R & D efforts.

22. As far as aircraft carrier are concerned, size matters. While we may not yet be in the league of the 100,000-ton super carriers, we certainly can make in India, large carriers, in the region of 65000-ton displacement.

23. Our current and predicted economic growth trajectory, affords to our defence planners the fiscal freedom to invest in long term military capability, which mirrors our national aspirations. The current political dispensation displays strategic vision and has thankfully, shed the decision-making lethargy /aversion it inherited.

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## **The U.S. Doesn't Understand Indian Diplomacy**

**By Dr. Abhinav Pandya**

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*In today's polarized world, India's hallmark "tightrope" balancing between rival power blocs and nations does not always sit well with the Western foreign ministries.*

During the early phase of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, India faced tremendous pressure from the West, particularly the United States, to align with the United States-led Western bloc and condemn Russia in unequivocal terms. However, India maintained its principled strategic neutrality, calling for an "immediate cessation of hostilities," an "end to the violence," and a "return to the path of diplomacy and dialogue." India's position is uncomfortable for many Western capitals, particularly Washington, DC.

In today's polarized world, India's hallmark "tightrope" balancing between rival power blocs and nations does not always sit well with the Western foreign ministries. The discomfort and unease in bilateral relations can be witnessed in the India-U.S. relationship. With an array of technological and strategic agreements like BECA, LEMOA, and COMCASA, as well as the common consensus on the emerging challenge of Chinese revisionism, there is nonetheless an acute sense of misunderstanding and lack of trust between New Delhi and Washington. This friction is visible in several instances, be it the U.S. legislators sermonizing India on so-called democratic backsliding, press freedom, minority issues, and human rights, the recent diplomatic stand-off between Canada and India over the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, an alleged Sikh-separatist terrorist, with the alleged Indian involvement, and U.S. accusations against Indian agencies for conspiring to murder Khalistani extremist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun.

The ambitious dreams of the grand U.S.-India strategic partnership and bonhomie always get punctured by Washington, DC's discomfort with India's independent stance on issues of critical geopolitical importance to the United States. Today, when Chinese revisionism presents a common challenge to both the United States and India, both countries do not see eye to eye on many issues. One hardly finds any steam in the India-U.S. partnership besides purely transactional technology, defense, and intelligence-sharing agreements. It seems that the United States cannot understand the nature of India's diplomatic behavior. This lack of understanding comes from the fundamental difference in the international relations thought of India and the Western World. The expert voices in the Indian establishment feel that due to this lack of understanding on the part of the United States, it cannot accept India's geopolitical posturing. At the same time, when the United States government is at odds with India on the issues of democracy, human rights, minorities, and the recent Canada-India row, it is perceived as a bully by Indians.

The United States must understand that India's stance on the Ukraine issue is not a novelty; it has existed since India emerged as a sovereign nation. During the Cold War, India adopted a non-alignment policy, refusing to align with the Western and Soviet power blocks. However, by the 1970s, India came closer to the USSR because of the overt U.S. support to Pakistan over the Bangladesh issue and the resultant India-Pakistan war. India also shared socialist sentiments and a rich civilizational connection with Russia. But, despite this tilt, India reasonably maintained its strategic autonomy.

India's history and civilizational ethos suggest that the Indian worldview on statecraft, diplomacy, and war tends to reject rigid binaries. India's historical and civilizational experience has not witnessed the division of the world into alliances and blocs based on ideological differences. Ideological "isms" and the "us versus them" mentality were not absent. However, they were never the dominant vectors. Likewise, a hegemon exercising an overarching influence over the weaker states based on sheer and brute power is not a characteristic feature of India's strategic thought.

Indian strategic thought places a high premium on multipolarity in global affairs, where states retain strategic autonomy and the freedom to pursue independent foreign policy based on their geography, core national interests, and values. In such a set-up, a unipolar hegemon lording over weaker states, conquering them by force, interfering in their internal affairs, forcing humiliating treaties and alliances, and dictating values and beliefs is an aberration.

This is not to say that there were no aggressive hegemons in Indian history, but such behavior was not accepted as the norm for a powerful state.

The best example of India's multipolar ideal comes from the sixteen Mahajanpadas of the legendary Vedic era. The sixteen Mahajanpadas were sovereign states sprawling from Afghanistan to today's Bengal two and a half millennia ago. Among them were powerful kingdoms like Kurus, Panchalas, and Magadhas. However, the powerful kingdoms did not gobble up the smaller kingdoms as a standard practice. It was primarily symbolic even when the smaller states were defeated in wars and subjugated. In rare cases, the conquerors deposed the ruler and occupied the territory to rule. Wars were fought for specific reasons, and great importance was accorded to the idea of Dharma-yuddha ("the righteous war"). Restoring moral order, not economic gain or territorial aggrandizement, was the object of conflict.

Bilateral diplomacy was the most preferred and effective tool for conducting foreign policy instead of over-arching and divisive military alliances. On the other hand, in the West, alliance systems and great power competition have been a fundamental part of international relations since at least the seventeenth century, culminating in the First World War, the Second World War, and the Cold War.

Delving deeper into the history of diplomacy, war, and statecraft in the West and India is not the key focus of this piece. However, suffice it to say that some of the fundamental tenets of India's foreign policy, particularly the importance of strategic autonomy, aversion to military alliances, strong displeasure and resilience against the pressure tactics of global powers, and preference for bilateral diplomacy and multipolarity in the world order emanate from its strategic subconscious rooted in its collective civilizational-historical experience and ethos.

Today, India has successfully bypassed the pressure from the West. While fearlessly guarding its strategic autonomy, it has maintained an independent foreign policy based on national interests, values, history, and geography. Be it the Russia-Ukraine conflict, China-U.S. rivalry, or the Israel-Hamas war, India has taken a principled stand of neutrality.

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## **Empowering Women: Political Participation in South Asian Countries on International Women's Day**

**By Dr. Santosh Mathew**

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"Women are the owners of half of the sky." - Chinese Proverb. International Women's Day, celebrated annually on March 8th, serves as a global platform to recognize and celebrate the achievements of women while also highlighting the challenges they face. In South Asian countries, women's political participation has been a pivotal aspect of the struggle for gender equality. As we commemorate International Women's Day, it is crucial to examine the progress, obstacles, and the role of women in shaping political landscapes in nations like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bhutan. International Women's Day traces its roots back to the early 20th century when women around the world began advocating for their rights and equality. The day's origins are often associated with the labour and socialist movements, with the first National Women's Day organized by the Socialist movement in the United States in 1909. Inspired by this, the International Women's Conference in Copenhagen in 1910 proposed the establishment of an annual Women's Day, leading to the first International Women's Day being celebrated in 1911.

The initial focus of International Women's Day was on demanding better working conditions, suffrage rights, and an end to discrimination. Over the years, the day evolved into a global celebration recognizing the achievements of women across various fields while highlighting persisting challenges, including gender-based violence, economic disparities, and limited political representation.

South Asian countries have a rich history of women actively participating in socio-political movements. From the Indian independence movement led by figures like Sarojini Naidu to the more recent political achievements of women like Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, the region has witnessed the gradual but significant inclusion of women in political spheres.

While progress has been made, South Asian countries still grapple with gender disparities in political representation. Women continue to face obstacles such as cultural stereotypes, patriarchal norms, and a lack of access to education and resources. Despite these challenges, there have been notable achievements, with women holding key positions in governments, legislatures, and local bodies.

India, for instance, boasts several prominent female political leaders, including Indira Gandhi, who served as the country's first female Prime Minister, and more recently, Sonia Gandhi, who has played a crucial role in Indian politics. In neighbouring Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto broke barriers as the first female Prime Minister in a Muslim-majority country.

Despite these success stories, women in South Asian countries often face deeply rooted societal norms that limit their political participation. The persistence of gender-based violence, unequal access to education, and traditional gender roles pose substantial barriers. Additionally, the lack of women-friendly policies, insufficient representation in political parties, and a general reluctance to accept women in leadership roles impede progress. However, the broader landscape reveals a stark imbalance when it comes to property rights. Despite the progress made, less than 1% of properties in South Asia are registered in the name of women. This glaring inequality perpetuates economic dependence, limits financial autonomy, and hampers the overall empowerment of women.

Efforts to address gender disparities in political participation have gained momentum in recent years. Many South Asian countries have implemented affirmative action policies to reserve seats for women in legislative bodies. For example, India's Panchayati Raj system reserves one-third of seats for women in local government institutions. These initiatives aim to provide women with a platform to voice their concerns and contribute to decision-making processes.

International Women's Day serves as a catalyst for empowering grassroots movements that advocate for women's rights and political participation. Civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, and women's rights activists play a crucial role in raising awareness, challenging stereotypes, and promoting gender equality in politics.

On International Women's Day, it is essential to acknowledge the progress made in South Asian countries regarding women's political participation. However, the road to achieving full gender equality is long, and concerted efforts are needed to overcome cultural, social, and political barriers. By celebrating the achievements of women in politics and addressing the challenges they face, we can contribute to building a more inclusive and equitable society for all. International Women's Day serves as a reminder of the ongoing struggle for gender equality and the collective responsibility to create a world where women's voices are heard and valued in political spheres. As we commemorate International Women's Day in 2024 under the theme "Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges," South Asian countries stand at a critical juncture. The progress made in women's political participation is commendable, but challenges persist. By fostering collaboration, leveraging technology, and celebrating achievements, we can work towards a future where women in South Asia actively contribute to and lead in political spheres.

On International Women's Day 2024, the ownership of half the sky is a poignant metaphor for the untapped potential of women in South Asia. As we celebrate their contributions to political spheres, it is crucial to address the systemic issue of property rights. Breaking barriers involves dismantling not only societal norms but also discriminatory laws and practices.

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## **China-Maldives Bonhomie: Changing Regional Dynamics in Indian Ocean**

**By Punit Shyam Gore**

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*The constantly evolving Indian Ocean Region's dynamics have witnessed far reaching consequences since the beginning of 2024.*

Maldives has entered into a military cooperation agreement of unprecedented significance with China, marking the first instance of such a deal between the two nations. Previously, China's involvement in the Maldives had been primarily focused on aiding urban and economic development.

President Mohamed Muizzu has announced a recent agreement with China, stating that the Maldives will receive complimentary "non-lethal" military equipment and training. Emphasising that this collaboration will enhance the independence and autonomy of the Indian Ocean Island nation, Muizzu held separate meetings with Major General Zhang Baoqun, Deputy Director of the Office for International Military Cooperation of China, and Ren Shengjun, President of the Export-Import Bank of China.

President Muizzu, widely perceived as a pro-China leader, disclosed specific information, emphasising that China and Maldives have consistently engaged in military cooperation. He clarified that the novel aspect of this agreement lies in the support the Maldives will receive to enhance its military capabilities.

The escalation of military ties between the Maldives and China follows President Muizzu's assertion that no Indian military personnel, including those in civilian attire, will be allowed within the country after May 10. Less than a week after an Indian civilian team arrived in the Maldives to assume control of one of the three aviation platforms in the island nation, President Muizzu's declaration is made. This occurs well in advance of the March 10 deadline, as agreed upon by both nations, for the withdrawal of Indian military personnel.

Soon after being sworn in as the Maldives President on November 17, Muizzu officially asked India to withdraw 88 military personnel from his country by March 15. He justified this request by citing the "strong mandate" given to him by the Maldivian people. In the September presidential runoff, the 45-year-old Muizzu defeated the incumbent Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, known for his friendly stance towards India. Notably, Muizzu departed from the tradition of newly elected Maldivian presidents making their first foreign visit to New Delhi as he visited Beijing in January. He met with Chinese President Xi Jinping and other leaders during his inaugural state visit to a foreign country.

### **Fast-Evolving Indian Ocean Region's Dynamics**

The constantly evolving Indian Ocean Region's Dynamics have witnessed a few major events since the beginning of 2024. The Maldives, which is India's geographically close neighbour, plays a vital role. The previous government in Male expanded bilateral ties with India, specifically in the defence and security sectors.

The government at present will soon review over a hundred Agreements stuck with India by the previous administration. Maldives is just 70 nautical miles away from Lakshadweep's Minicoy Island and 300 nautical miles away from the Indian mainland. It is strategically situated in the centre of the commercial sea lanes in the IOR, which adds to its regional importance.

China's state media outlet Global Times recently asserted China portraying a skeptical image of India as a dominant figure in the Indian Ocean region. Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar countered this assertion, emphasising that the pivotal change in this area is the strengthening relationship between India and its neighbouring nations. It is essential to acknowledge that labelling India as a bully is misleading, as such conduct does not align with a bully's actions. A genuine bully would not extend \$4.5 billion in aid to neighbouring countries in need, supply vaccines to other nations during the COVID-19 pandemic, or make exceptions to their rules to accommodate food, fuel, or fertiliser demands, all in response to the complexities arising from conflicts in other regions, Jaishankar observed.

Meanwhile, President Muizzu stated that the Maldivian government is working on acquiring facilities and machines to conduct hydrological surveys independently within the mainland Maldives. This will enable the Male to conduct an underwater survey for features and create charts without external assistance. Previously, the administration of President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih had agreed with India to conduct such surveys, but President Muizzu's government decided not to renew the contract. He emphasised the importance of owning the information about the country's underwater features, as they are part of the nation's heritage.

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## **India is Proud of: Sunitha Krishnan Success story of a Social Activist**



One must need a lot of courage to speak on the sensitive topics of society. Action begins with desire. Many people have the desire to bring a change in society, but only a few dares to do it. One such personality is Dr Sunitha Krishnan, a social activist and the co-founder of Prajwala (NGO) that rescues sex-trafficked victims. Here is her success story, which is truly inspiring.

Sunitha Krishna was born on 23 May 1969 in Bangalore, India into a Palakkad Malayali family. Raju Krishnan (her father) was an employee at the Department of Survey, India. Krishnan was born with a disability. Her legs were turned behind and went through regular sessions of treatment. At the age of eight, she used to teach mentally challenged children.

By twelve, while she was schooling at Kendriya Vidyalaya Waltair, Visakhapatnam, she began to take classes for children at slums and worked on a neo-literacy campaign for Dalits. During this time, she was gang-raped by eight men who were against of her actions. This incident pushed her towards what she does today.

Later, she studied in various government schools in Bangalore and Bhutan. Upon obtaining the bachelor's degree in environmental sciences, she went to Mangalore to pursue Master of Social Work (medical and psychiatric) at Roshni Nilaya and obtained PhD as well. She married an Indian Film Director – Rajesh Touchriver.

Subsequently, she moved to Hyderabad to join the People's Initiative Network (PIN) founded by Brother Varghese Theckanath for the benefit of people living in slums. In 1996, while she was working in PIN, she joined the housing rights campaign and thwarted the scheme of "beautification project" near the Musi River. Along the Theckanath, she trained young people at risk and helped them by providing job opportunities.

Moreover, in the same year, many sex-workers living in a red-light area in Hyderabad had to evacuate the brothel and became homeless. Concerned about their well-being, she decided to provide shelter for them by starting a school at the vacated place, which is now known as PRAJWALA.

The five motives of Prajwala are – Prevention, Protection, Rescue, Rehabilitation and Reintegration.

Indeed, her aspiration to save the "second generation" from being trafficked has led to a program. It operates in above 17 transition centers in India. This has made Prajwala the largest anti-trafficking shelters in the world. Also, she led the #ShameTheRapist campaign in 2015. Besides providing shelter for the victims, Prajwala also trains them on various maintenance works like welding, painting, carpentry, housekeeping, etc.

The Government of Andhra Pradesh passed recommendations drafted by Sunitha Krishnan in 2003, to rescue and rehabilitate victims of sexual violence. In 2013, she became the member of Andhra Pradesh State's Commission.

At the same time, Sunitha Krishnan functioned as the advisor for the Government of Kerala's Nirbhaya policy. She drafted this scheme herself and tried to collaborate with various departments like social welfare, police, health, labor, etc. She resigned from this position due to lack of enough support from the government. Later, they reappointed her and gave more authority.

Besides being a social activist, she also published a few documents on human trafficking of which "The Shattered Innocence" received lot of appreciation. Sunitha Krishnan realized that making films depicting the harsh realities of human trafficking would help her achieve goals to form a new society. A documentary named "Anamika" produced by her in 2005, took home many awards. Furthermore, in collaboration with the Suntouch Productions, she launched a feature film on sex trafficking named "Ente" in Malayalam and "Naa Bangaru Thalli" in Telugu which has won about 8 International awards.

She has been conferred with many awards e.g. Padma Shri Award in the field of Social Work (2016), Mother Teresa Award for Social Justice (2014), Mahila Thilakam Award, Government of Kerala (2013), Gangadhar Humanitarian Award – Kerala (2010), Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report Heroes from US Department of State (2009), Stree Shaki Puraskar, Government of India (2003).

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