

India, Mauritius look to reboot ties with maritime security deal

The agreement will also help India keep a closer watch on the western Indian Ocean

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India is seeking to enhance its bilateral ties with Mauritius by signing a maritime agreement during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ongoing two-day visit to that country.

Once signed, the Indian and Mauritian navies and coast guards are expected to start exchanging information on commercial shipping around the respective territorial waters.

The white shipping agreement will also help India to keep a closer watch on the western Indian Ocean.

An announcement on this is still pending while going to press.

The deepening of India-Mauritius relations, especially related to maritime security, comes at a time of expanding Chinese activity in the Indian Ocean region, as well as the continuing US pivot to Asia.

The Indian warship *INS Imphal*, which made its maiden port call to Mauritius on March 10, will participate in the country's national day parades in Port Louis on March 12, when Modi will be the chief guest.

Indian military ships and aircraft have featured in the island country's



Indian warship INS Imphal is in Port Louis, Mauritius, to participate in that country's National Day on March 12

PHOTO: INDIAN NAVY

events in the past.

INS Imphal, an indigenous destroyer that was commissioned in 2023, will be in Mauritian waters until March 14 and take part in activities with the host country's navy and coast guard. A joint surveillance in the country's exclusive economic zone and an exercise with MCGS ships have been planned, according to an Indian Navy media statement.

Of the MCGS ships, the Barracuda is an offshore patrol vessel that was built by an Indian com-

pany for the National Coast Guard of Mauritius. Modi, who was in Mauritius at the commissioning of the ship in 2015, had then announced the Indian government's foreign policy initiative called Sagar, the Hindi word for ocean, and a loose acronym for "security and growth for all in the region".

"India needs to establish informational domination in the Indian Ocean, keeping in mind the long-term threat from China's PLA

Navy," retired Rear Admiral Raja Menon said, adding that India will need aircraft refuelling bases in the future.

Mauritius gained independence from the United Kingdom 57 years ago. But the UK still retains control over the Chagos archipelago. The UK has leased Diego Garcia, the largest island of the group, to the US since 1966 for a joint military base.

An international tribunal for the laws of the sea ruled in 2021 that the UK must hand back Chagos to Mauritius. The US, for which the island has been an important military base in the Indian Ocean region, said it would back the UK in a deal with Mauritius. The UK has said it would return Chagos but hold on to Diego Garcia.

India has supported Mauritian sovereignty over Chagos for long. India has helped Mauritius build an air strip and some other infrastructure on the remote Mauritian island of Agalega. Both the countries denied through the media that India has ambitions to open its own military base there someday.

"India needs the understanding of Mauritius amid the geopolitical changes that Chagos will see," Menon said.