



ISSN: 2395-7852



# International Journal of Advanced Research in Arts, Science, Engineering & Management

Volume 12, Issue 2, March- April 2025



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

**Impact Factor: 8.028**

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# Necklace of Diamonds: India's Encirclement Strategy Against China

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**ABSTRACT:** Necklace of diamonds is a geopolitical strategy of India. The objective of this strategy is to counter China's string of pearls Strategy. With the string of pearls policy China wants to encircling India in the Indian Ocean. To counter this strategy of China, India also plan to encircle China. This encircling strategy of India is known as the necklace of diamonds. This paper has mentioned important countries for India to counter China's influence in the Indian Ocean and explained India's activity to secure itself from China's encirclement strategy.

**KEYWORD:** India, China, Geopolitics, Indian Ocean.

## I. INTRODUCTION

China and India are two of the major powers and most populous countries in Asia. Both countries known as the dominant powers in recent world politics. Indian ocean is very much important for India and China because Indian Ocean holds important strategic trade routes and choke points. China and India are Asia's two rising power, who aim to dominate the Indian Ocean to satisfy their regional and global ambitions. The competitiveness for regional influence has resulted in geo-strategic competition in the Indian Ocean.<sup>1</sup> China is expanding its presence in the Indian Ocean through Debt Trap Diplomacy and String of Pearls Strategy over the past few years. There is no doubt that China is building a military circle around India by continuing its operations in Myanmar, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Maldives, and other countries in the Indian Ocean. It is a geopolitical strategy primarily to build commercial facilities, military bases and ports around India's neighbouring countries in the Indian Ocean region to protect China's interest. China wants to expand influence in South Asia and Indian ocean by the string of pearls policy. This policy like China Pakistani Economic Corridor and China's One Belt One Road Initiative pose a security threat to India. So, India has also made a policy plan to counter China's strategic string of pearls policy, which is called "Necklace of Diamond Strategy".

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Gupta, R. (2022), in research paper "How India's Necklace Of Diamond Outsmarted China's 'String Of Pearls' In The Indian Ocean", has told that, string of pearls is a China's strategy to expand its influence in the Indian Ocean, the Arabian sea and the Bay of Bengal. For the purpose of marketing its goods, China is attempting to revive the old silk route. China has already entered Djibouti, Gwadar port, Hambantota port, Karachi port and Kyaukpyu port. China's objective is to strengthen its presence at the choke points of important shipping lanes, such as the Lombok strait, strait of Hormuz, strait of Malacca and the strait of Mandeb. After the realising this activity of China India first revealed its presence in the strait of Malacca. India has gained access to Changi naval base in Singapore, Sabang port in Indonesia, Assumption Island in Seychelles, Doqm port in Oman. India is also building strategic alliances with China's neighbouring countries.<sup>2</sup>

Das, A. (2021), in her research work, "India's strategies of Indo-Pacific region", has mentioned the creation of naval base and port in various diamonds to counter China's string of pearls policy. She also described India's initiative to increase its proactivity with regional organisation and Maritime Cooperation such as Bay Of Bengal Initiative For Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic cooperation (BIMSTEC) and Security And Growth For All In The Region (SAGAR) to counter China's this policy.<sup>3</sup>

Bhattacharya, S. et al.(2021), wrote a paper "Can India's Necklace Of Diamond Strategy Defeat The China's String of Pearls". This paper has gave more importance to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as a India's diamond. The islands plays an important role in enhancing India's territorial involvement in the Bay of Bengal littoral. India has created a proactive strategy to turn the Andaman and Nicobar Islands into a tri-service command and make the Island a crucial hub of India's security and defence strategy.<sup>4</sup>

### Research objective

To find out important 'Diamond' countries for India and India's activity in order to counter Chinese string of pearls Strategy.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The study has been conducted based on descriptive method of research and help of secondary data. Data has been collected from various sources like as books, journals, newspaper articles etc..

#### **String of Pearls Strategy of China**

The phrase “string of pearls strategy” refers to the idea of strategically encircling India in the Indian Ocean. This strategy has been never mentioned any Chinese official document. The phrase is used in media and educational perspective. The string of pearls is a geopolitical hypothesis proposed by United States. In 2004, Booz Allen Hamilton, a consulting firm based in the United States, first proposed the string of pearls geographical theory. The term refers to the network of Chinese military and commercial facilities and relationships along its sea lines of communication, which extends from Chinese mainland to port Sudan in the Horn of Africa.<sup>5</sup> Specifically it refers to the network of military and commercial facilities built by China in the countries along the Indian Ocean. Port development around India such as Gwadar, Hambantota, Chittagong port etc. by China are seen as part of the string of pearls. Although these are commercial ports, there are fears that they could easily be converted into naval facilities in the event of a conflict with India. This policy will give China ideal opportunity to conduct war in the Indian Ocean region. Various strategic pearls of China are-

**Pakistan** : As part of the China-Pakistani Economic Corridor Project (CPEC), China has built a sea port in Pakistan's Gwadar. This port will help China to counter India from the west in any war-like situation.

**Bangladesh** : China increase its presence in this country through developed and modernized the Chittagong port for easy transit of commercial activities. Three natural gas fields in Bangladesh were purchased by Chinese companies in 2017. China was gained access to Bangladesh’s two largest sea ports - Mongla and Chattogram, in 2019. The development of Mongla port was also agreed upon by china. China has also expressed interest in building and operating the high speed rail project between Dhaka and Chattogram. China’s offer to Bangladesh to manage the water of Teesta river is a major concerned for India.<sup>6</sup> China has built naval base in Chittagong to protect its trade interests. China has invested heavily in the Bangladesh’s domestic infrastructure development.

**Myanmar** : China is strengthening its military and economic ties with Myanmar in order to use it territory against India. The two Islands of Coco group have been leased to China since 1994. These are located at an crucial point in the traffic routes between the Bay of Bengal and state of Malacca. <sup>7</sup> China is constructing military base on Coco Island, located near the Andaman and Nicobar. Coco Island is situated at ideal place from where China can monitor India’s naval and missile launch facilities. China has signed a agreement with Myanmar to develop deep-sea port in Kyaukpyu town of Myanmar, which is located along the Bay of Bengal. It can be used by China as a military base against India in time of conflict.

**Maldives** : This nation is located close to the Indian Island of Lakshadweep in the Indian Ocean. China has also build military base in this nation. China has infrastructure development project in Feydhoo Finolhu, Kunaavashi, Male and adjacent Hulhumale in Maldives.

**Sri Lanka** : China has also set foot on Sri Lankan soil . China has taken control of Sri Lanka's Hambantota port through using the Debt Trap Diplomacy. Sri Lanka handed over its Hambantota port to China on a 99 years leased because it failed to repayment the loan to China .<sup>8</sup> China's presence in Sri Lanka has become a major security concern for India.

**Persian gulf** : China has signed a 25 years , 400 billion strategic and economic partnership agreement with Iran in 2021.<sup>9</sup> This investment in Iran will give China a positive step in middle East. China increasing its presence in Oman by investing in various infrastructure development projects. One of the example is- China has signed an agreement to construct an industrial city in the Oman’s southern port of Doqm at a cost of billion of dollars.<sup>10</sup> Presence in Oman will increase China’s presence in Indian Ocean and Arabian sea.

**Yemen** : China has signed several important agreement with Yemen to develop the country’s infrastructure which includes the construction of three natural gas-fired power plants, the construction of two container ports at the cost of \$ 508 million in the southern cities of Aden and Mokha.

**Djibouti** : Djibouti is a strategically important country of Horn of Africa. China is start to constructing military base at Djibouti in 2016, that’s reflect the China’s presence in this country. China’s military base in Djibouti is its first overseas military base. Djibouti is strategically located on entrance of Bab-el-Mandeb strait, which links Red sea with Indian Ocean. This military base will be very helpful for China during the conflict.

**Seychelles** : It is a Islands country. China setup its naval base in this country also. Chinese authorities says that the Seychelles base will be used to supply naval ship on anti-piracy mission of the coast of Somalia, and that China will not station its troops abroad.<sup>11</sup>



China is taking advantage of the economic compulsion of some East African countries. Using its debt trap diplomacy, China is investing huge amount of money in infrastructure projects in there. This regards some strategically important countries are Sudan, Kenya, Eritrea and Tanzania. China increasing its presence in this countries. It is believed that China will use these countries in its favour during the conflict.

**Strait of Malacca :** This is one of the important busiest sea route in the world. The strait is very much significant for China and overall East Asia. The strait of Malacca connects the Indian ocean with South China sea (Pacific Ocean). Malacca is a important region for China because through this strait large percentage of China's imported oil passes to China. Therefore, China is continuously working to build friendly relations with the countries surrounding the strait of Malacca.

China is building a network of military facilities and commercial facilities in the Indian Ocean region under the string of pearls policy. Also, China is trying to improves its relation with the countries surrounding the Indian Ocean in such a way that it can use the countries against India in any situations. This move by China poses a serious threat to India's security. India came up with the necklace of diamonds strategy to counter China's initiatives.

#### IV. NECKLACE OF DIAMONDS

'Necklace of Diamonds' strategy, a phrase first used by Indian foreign secretary Lalit Mansingh while speaking at think tank in 2011.<sup>12</sup> India's necklace of diamond strategy is a response to China's string of pearls. It is a informal strategy. It is not a part of any Indian official document. The purpose of this policy is to counter China's string of pearls policy. The Necklace of Diamonds Strategy defines encircling China by strengthening India's naval power, increasing its military infrastructure and strengthening its ties to other countries in the area. India is taking multi-pronged initiatives to counter China's encirclement strategy. Initiatives taken by India includes building ports, importing sophisticated surveillance aircraft that can track Chinese submarines, deploying an elaborate Coastal Surveillance Rader (CSR) system in order to monitor Chinese submarines and warships, operating airports in neighbouring countries to keep eye on Chinese port etc..<sup>13</sup> India is strengthening bilateral relations with South East Asian countries, South Asian countries and Indian ocean's Island countries. India's key 'diamonds' in dealing with China are –

**Andaman and Nicobar Island :** The most important Diamond for India is the Andaman-Nicobar Island, India's own territory. Andaman-Nicobar Island is a important part of this strategy. Andaman-Nicobar Islands will help India to counter China's assertiveness in the Indian Ocean. 60% of China's total trade passes through near the Andaman-Nicobar Island. In case of aggression between India and China, India can block China's access on this route. India will be able to give a significant blow to China's economy. India has build three full fledged naval air station in the Island that are used for military purpose: INS Utkorsh in port Blair, INS Baaz in Great Nicobar and INS Kohassa in North Andaman. Andaman and Nicobar commands capabilities was strengthened in 2019 with the approval of a special 5,650 crore military infrastructure development plan. A comprehensive plan for 'force accretion' at the Andaman and Nicobar command by 2027 is also being nurtured.<sup>14</sup>

**Indonesia :** India is developing a deep sea port in Sabang, located Aceh province of Indonesia. Sabang port is situated directly at the mouth of the Malacca strait . This strait is well known choke point in the world. Through this area, a significant portion trade and crude oil is passes to China. India gained military access to Sabang port in 2018, which will enable India to strengthen its military presence in the Indian Ocean as well as enhance surveillance capability.

**Singapore :** An important diamond for India is the Changi Naval base located in Singapore. Changi naval base is strategically situated close to the strait of Malacca . In 2017, India and Singapore signed a bilateral (naval cooperation) agreement, which has provided direct access to this base to the Indian Navy. It can enable Indian Navy to get logistical support and refuelling the ship at the Changi naval base. India's presence at Changi naval base is a significant counter to China's expansionist objectives in the Indian Ocean.

**Myanmar :** In 2016, India built a deep water sea port at Sittwe, the capital of Myanmar's Rakhain state. The Sittwe port is funded by India under the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project. In 2019 India and Myanmar signed a defence cooperation agreement for boosting bilateral military agreement.

**Bangladesh :** Bangladesh is a close neighbour country of India. Both countries always carries a good relationship. Recently Bangladesh has provided transit and trans-shipment facilities for cargo vessel to India at Chittagong and Mongla port. In 2019 India signed a agreement with Bangladesh for setting up 20 coastal surveillance radar system along the Bangladesh. This will enable India to monitor Chinese warship entering Bay of Bengal.



**Sri Lanka :** In order to monitor the Chinese Navy, India acquired a Sri Lankan Airbase in Hambantota in 2018. It could be transformed into an fully functional Indian airbase in Sri Lanka and can be utilise in the event of Chinese threats. India has installed 6 Costa surveillance radar in Sri Lanka. Which serves to identify the movement of ships around the Island .

**Tajikistan :** India has build an airbase in Tajikistan. It is located 130 kilometres southeast of Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan .

**Mongolia :** PM Narendra Modi is the first Indian PM who visit the India's important diamond Mongolia and developed a strategic relationship. India provided USD 1 billion lines of credit to Mongolia to expand its economic capacity and infrastructure development.<sup>15</sup> India has established a strong relationship with Mongolia by helping to build air corridor.

**Vietnam :** India is developing good relations with Vietnam. India-Vietnam bilateral relations were upgraded to comprehensive strategic partnership during the visit of Indian PM Modi to Vietnam in 2016. As part of increasing maritime cooperation both countries are conducting passage exercise (PASSEX). India has also activated a satellite imaging and tracking station in Hanoi, enabling it to track Chinese navel activities in the region.<sup>16</sup>

**Maldives :** China's presence in Maldives is a concern for India. In view of China's growing footprint in the Ocean , the Maldives is seen as important diamond to India's strategic interest. India plans to deploy 10 coastal surveillance radars in Maldives. This radars will give real time image, videos and information about the location of vessels moving in the Indian Ocean. As of 2019, 7 costal surveillance radar installation have been completed . The construction of the Indian military base in the Maldives has officially started. The base is being built on the Island of Uthuruthilafalhu near the Maldivian capital Male, is part of an agreements singed between the Maldivian Defence Ministry and India in 2021.<sup>17</sup> Defence cooperation between India and Maldives, will increase India's ability to track Chinese Maritime and navel activities in the Indian Ocean around the Maldives.

**Iran :** India is building a port in Iran known as Chabahar port . This port is strategically situated close to the strait of Hormuz and the Chinese Gwadar port in Pakistan. It is considered a entrance for India's trade with Iran and Central Asian countries. In order to counter CPEC and Chinese influence in the Arabian sea this port will be beneficial for India.

**Oman :** After Sabang port in Indonesia an important port for India is Doqm port. It is situated on Oman southern coast. As a step to increase its footprint in the Indian Ocean, in 2018 India has gained access to the crucial port of Doqm in Oman for military use and logistical support. It is an integral part of India's Maritime strategy in order to counter Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean. Oman is very important for India's defence and strategic interest. Both country's armed force regular conduct bilateral exercise.

**Seychelles:** Seychelles is an important diamond for India. India and Seychelles signed an agreement for built of an Indian Naval base at Assumption Island of Seychelles. The primary goal of this Indian naval base is to counter China's encirclement strategy in the Indian Ocean which is known as string of pearls Strategy. India has also installed coastal surveillance radars system in Seychelles.

**Mauritius:** Mauritius is an Island of the southeast coast of Africa that is situated in the Indian Ocean. India is constructing military facilities in Mauritius's Agalega Island in order to strengthen its position in the Western Indian ocean. The Island is leased to the Indian military for the development of strategic assets as of India-Mauritius military cooperation. At present, the Island serves as an Indian military base in Mauritius.<sup>18</sup> In 2015 during the PM Modi visit to Mauritius two nations signed a memorandum understanding for improvement of sea and air facilities in Mauritius's Agalega Island. India have been installed 8 coastal surveillance radar in Mauritius.

The above mentioned all countries are an important diamond for India in countering China's aggressive policies in the Indian Ocean. India also developing strategic relations with several countries such as Japan, South Korea, Philippines, Thailand etc.. India has also been conducting regular exercise with friendly nations at sea. Socotra Island of Republic of Yemen can be considered as an important Diamond for India. The Island is situated a crucial location in the Indian Ocean. India's presence in this Island will increase India's strength in the Indian Ocean. Having an Indian military base in this Island would be helpful to counter China's sting of pearls policy. In recent times, the Yemeni Island Socotra has gained regional and international attention because of its strategic location at the entrance of Gulf of Aden.

To counter China's strategy, India is taking initiatives such building ports and military base in strategically located countries, signing bilateral agreement and improving trade relations with the various countries, which will help India in



the time of conflict. The string of pearls policy of China is not only concern for India but also other small countries. Because China is using its debt trap diplomacy to increase its presence in the smaller countries of the Indian Ocean. Therefore all countries need to be careful about this assertiveness of China and come forward to counter it.

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