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Research Article

Blue Diplomacy and Oceanic Geopolitics in the Indian Ocean Rim: Comparative Perspectives from the Western Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal

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Abstract

The article investigates how blue diplomacy and oceanic geopolitical developments function within Indian Ocean Rim countries through its examination of Western Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal Ocean governance, which unites security interests with geoeconomic matters and climate diplomacy efforts. The study establishes a conceptual connection between maritime strategy and geoeconomic statecraft through their relationship with blue economy narratives and regional maritime governance regime complexity. The research relies on recent academic work which demonstrates the strategic importance of chokepoints and corridor vulnerabilities because the Strait of Hormuz handles approximately 13 per cent of worldwide maritime trade and chokepoint disruptions create systemic financial disturbances. The article demonstrates that the two subregions establish different blue diplomacy entry points because the Western Indian Ocean is more influenced by maritime security and small-state agency which Seychelles demonstrates through its US\$15 million blue bond program, and the Bay of Bengal develops through first development connectivity politics and port-corridor competition. Climate diplomacy operates as a unified driver that connects all aspects of climate change because scientists have documented sea-level rise at 3.7 millimetres per year between 2006 and 2018, while 44.1 million people in Asia Pacific regions live at elevations below 1 meter above mean sea level. The research results demonstrate that divided institutional systems create two effects that lead to strategic independence through different forums while creating difficulties for implementation because of duplicated efforts and varying organisational abilities. The article provides policy recommendations for blue diplomacy, which include climate-resilient port governance and fisheries compliance, and interoperable maritime domain awareness systems throughout the Indian Ocean Rim.

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KEYWORDS: Blue diplomacy; Indian Ocean Rim; Western Indian Ocean; Bay of Bengal; Port geopolitics; Climate diplomacy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Indian Ocean Rim has emerged as the main naval battleground that links trade relationships with military conflicts and environmental threats; thus, "blue diplomacy" has developed into a new diplomatic approach that connects naval strength with ocean management and environmental protection efforts throughout various territorial ranges (UNCTAD, 2025; Zhang, 2025). Global shipping carries "over 80% of world trade," meaning that disruptions in Indian Ocean sea lanes translate rapidly into inflationary pressures, supply-chain insecurity, and diplomatic contestation over routing, insurance, and port access (UNCTAD, 2025). The strategic value of ports, chokepoints, and exclusive economic zones now encompasses more than naval warfare because these areas now need infrastructure financing, standard development, fishery management, and climate negotiations to proceed through "blue" issue discussions instead of separate security and development processes (Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2022; UNCTAD, 2024). UN Trade and Development reported that global maritime trade reached 12.3 billion tons in 2023 after a 2.4% increase, which demonstrates that even small percentage changes result in large quantity shifts that increase the strategic importance of stable maritime routes and effective shipping facilities (UNCTAD, 2024). The same report highlights that maritime trade volumes rose to 12,720 million tons in 2024 (a 2.2% increase), while projecting heightened uncertainty for 2025, strengthening the argument that "blue diplomacy" now operates as crisis management as much as long-term governance (UNCTAD, 2025; Safety4Sea, 2025).

The Indian Ocean Rim presents a unique analytical framework because its maritime order results from both major power strategies and the efforts of coastal and island nations, which use maritime space to gain diplomatic advantages through their multilateral agreements and financial partnerships and their formation of regulatory alliances (Benzaken et al., 2024; Frumento, 2026). The Western Indian Ocean illustrates this particularly well, where "large ocean states" such as Seychelles and Mauritius have pursued blue-economy pathways that deliberately fuse conservation commitments with external partnerships and innovative financing, reframing vulnerability as bargaining power in climate and development negotiations (Benzaken, 2022; Benzaken et al., 2024). The blue economy discourse gains increasing policy significance because it organises major economic interests which global policy discussions estimate at multi-trillion-dollar value, while distributional inequities, governance gaps and ecological limits turn blue growth into a legitimacy risk when coastal communities do not receive direct benefits (Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2022; ORF, 2025). The FAO reports that aquaculture provided more than 57% of aquatic animal foods available for human consumption in 2022, which has major implications for Indian Ocean diplomatic efforts because fisheries access, labour conditions, and sustainability standards have become key points of negotiation between nations (FAO, 2024). The connection between food security and maritime policing exists because illegal and unregulated activities, together with disputed licensing systems and threats to coastal communities, commonly create situations that enable strategic

conflicts to develop and governance systems to disintegrate (FAO, 2024; Zhang, 2025).

The Bay of Bengal serves as a separate strategic operational area which shares similarities with other regions because its demographic population and political connections create higher risks for port construction and regional institutional cooperation (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025). The BIMSTEC region brings together 1.7 billion people who make up approximately 22% of the world population, according to India's Ministry of External Affairs. The combined GDP of this region reaches about US\$5 trillion, which establishes Bay of Bengal maritime governance as a major economic and human security challenge that most subregions cannot reach (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025, p. 1). The Bay of Bengal serves as a centre for diplomatic competition that involves infrastructure development. A recent policy study shows that "approximately 30% of global trade flows are handled by ports in the Bay of Bengal region." The study identifies Colombo, Chennai, and Chattogram as important ports whose operational performance and ownership structure create both economic and strategic outcomes (CSEP, 2025, p. 6). The estimated figures support the conclusion that port governance functions as the main tool for geoeconomic statecraft because it combines different elements such as financing terms and operational control with dual-use security concerns together with the political importance of "connectivity" narratives (CSEP, 2025; UNCTAD, 2024). Blue diplomacy in the Bay of Bengal involves two main functions. First, it includes environmental cooperation, while it remains second. The second function focuses on negotiating infrastructure corridors together with logistics integration and the political economy that governs global value chain access (CSEP, 2025; Ministry of External Affairs, 2025).

1.1. Objectives of the Study

1. To develop blue diplomacy together with oceanic geopolitics that exist in the Indian Ocean Rim.
2. To evaluate the governance systems and strategic factors that drive operations in both the Western Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal regions.
3. To evaluate the effects that port development and maritime connectivity have on regional power dynamics.
4. To investigate climate diplomacy together with sustainability as factors that drive both maritime partnerships and territorial disputes.
5. To develop applicable insights which will help establish ocean governance procedures and maritime security partnership activities.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research study uses qualitative research methods to examine existing secondary data sources. The analysis employs peer-reviewed journal articles, edited book chapters, and scholarly review papers that were published between 2021 and 2026 to validate contemporary debates on blue diplomacy, maritime strategy and ocean governance. Researchers use keyword searches with predefined terms such as "blue diplomacy", "Indian Ocean Rim", "Western Indian Ocean", "Bay of Bengal", "port geopolitics" and "climate diplomacy" to

select secondary sources, which they evaluate based on their methodological standards, relevance and recent publication dates. The study uses comparative analysis to compare political, economic, and environmental factors between the Western Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal. The research uses thematic coding to organise literature, which enables the research team to create a unified understanding of maritime security, infrastructure development, regional institutions, and sustainability governance while they study state behaviour patterns and how regional order develops.

3. Historical Context of Indian Ocean Maritime Order

3.1 The Indian Ocean as a Strategic and Civilizational Space

The Indian Ocean has functioned throughout history as a connecting space that unites African, Middle Eastern, South Asian, and Southeast Asian trade routes. Blue diplomacy today represents an intensified version of existing connectivity politics which dates back to the past (Islam 2023). Merchants who control sea trade routes and access ports gain power through their ability to forecast economic trends and secure their nations' diplomatic advantages in the present-day world (Notteboom et al., 2021). The Indian Ocean functions as a strategic space because it contains essential chokepoints that handle most worldwide trade and link production centres with markets that meet consumer demand (Verschuur et al., 2025). The value of maritime trade that passes through the Taiwan and Malacca straits accounts for 20% of all global maritime trade. Therefore, Indian Ocean Rim strategies must be studied through corridor systems because they extend beyond national boundaries (Verschuur et al., 2025). States use historical events to validate their present-day maritime activities, which include port-based expansion and institutional development initiatives (Islam, 2023).

3.2 From Post-Colonial Maritime Cooperation to Indo-Pacific Competition

The Indian Ocean post-colonial cooperation program started as an initiative for economic growth and development, but current developments show that Indo-Pacific competition has taken control of security matters and infrastructure development and standardisation processes (Konwer, 2025). The Indo-Pacific framework increases the importance of maritime governance because it connects two vital routes that stretch from the western Indian Ocean to the eastern Bay of Bengal through a unified security network that controls movement and defence capabilities (Bueger et al., 2025). The evidence of systemic damages which occur from chokepoint interruption creates a material basis for this change because the Suez Canal blockage during 2021, which lasted six days, caused daily losses between US\$6 billion and US\$10 billion. Maritime disruptions transform into international political conflicts (Wang, 2023). New security programs create governance problems because they develop security partnerships that operate with existing cooperative groups (Bueger et al., 2025). Indian Ocean Rim nations use institutionalised relationships to build up their independence by creating multiple partnerships, which makes them more likely to face institutional breakdown, according to

the Indian Ocean Rim countries' competition. (Bueger et al., 2025).

3.3 Emergence of the Indian Ocean Rim as a Regional Political Space

The Indian Ocean Rim functions as a political area when countries work together to manage ocean matters, which include trade, security, fisheries and climate risks, through shared governance instead of treating them as national issues (Islam, 2023). The process developed into regional organisations through their institutional framework, which created platforms for shaping agendas, spreading norms, and managing international relations (Bueger et al., 2025). IORA's current identity shows how its members create an Indian Ocean identity through their political actions but face restrictions because they lack essential resources and political support (Islam, 2023). BIMSTEC has strengthened the Bay of Bengal regional political space by creating subregional partnership structures that connect South Asia with Southeast Asia through their security and connectivity initiatives (Konwer, 2025). The systems that develop through these areas create multiple governance frameworks because different organizations hold overlapping authority while their members differ between organisations. This situation needs investigation because it represents a normal aspect of Indian Ocean governance (Bueger et al., 2025).

3.4 Sea Lanes, Chokepoints, and Maritime Connectivity

The Indian Ocean geopolitical framework relies on sea lanes and chokepoints as essential pathways that handle trade through specific routes. Any route interruption will lead to international economic disruption and internal governmental problems (Verschuur et al., 2025). Chokepoints serve multiple purposes. They control oil and essential materials and manage containerised shipments, intermediate materials, and time-sensitive merchandise that industrial companies need to operate their businesses (Verschuur et al., 2025). The Gulf-Indian Ocean security dynamics create effects beyond their immediate area because the Strait of Hormuz handles up to 13 per cent of the world's maritime trade, which shows its importance for global trade routes (Verschuur et al., 2025). Ports operate as system nodes for maritime connectivity because their operational effectiveness and management systems establish the capacity of nations to achieve economic benefits from their established corridors (Notteboom et al., 2021). The design of corridors together with the control of ports and standard development activities creates strategic elements which determine both market access and security dependencies (Notteboom et al., 2021).

4. INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE OF BLUE DIPLOMACY

4.1 IORA and the Blue Economy Agenda

The blue diplomatic efforts of Indian Ocean Rim countries depend on IORA because the organisation establishes a region-wide platform that enables the combination of various maritime security and blue economy development agendas (Islam, 2023).

The Indo-Pacific discussions have increased IORA's importance as member states look for regional platforms that handle external power activities and support their "rules-based" ocean governance positions (du Plessis, 2024). The expansion of IORA membership to 23 countries has created a regional organisation which provides agenda-setting power through its membership base, but this expansion makes it difficult to reach agreements on important security matters (Islam, 2023). The blue economy agenda of IORA holds political value because it establishes ocean development as a collective national priority, which enables links between trade, sustainability, and capacity building to be established (Islam, 2023). IORA demonstrates the traditional regionalism problem because its efforts to include different groups result in weak institutional development and varying levels of execution power (Islam, 2023).

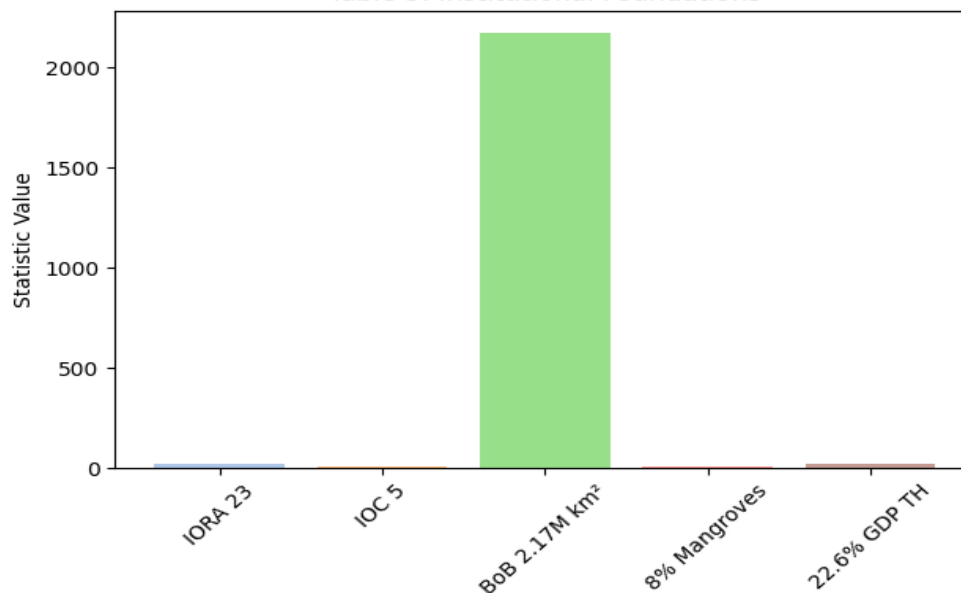
4.2 BIMSTEC and Bay of Bengal Maritime Cooperation

BIMSTEC's maritime cooperation agenda establishes a permanent framework for Bay of Bengal blue diplomacy through its institutional setup, which connects South and Southeast Asian regions using security and transportation ties (Konwer, 2025). The blue economy policy now serves as a main focus for BIMSTEC because ocean resources play a crucial role in determining how coastal countries develop their economies (Islam, 2025). The Bay of Bengal extends over 2.17 million square kilometres, which creates significant difficulties for governing fishery activities, disaster response operations, and marine resource conservation efforts (Islam, 2025). The Bay of Bengal houses 8% of global mangroves and 12% of worldwide coral reefs, which makes blue diplomacy essential for biodiversity protection and climate adaptation efforts (Islam, 2025). Blue economy sectors in the Bay of Bengal littorals, which include Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, generate economic output that ranges from 3.2% to 22.6% of GDP, according to reports (Islam, 2025).

Table 1. Institutional and ecological foundations of blue diplomacy across the two subregions (peer-reviewed evidence, 2023–2026)

Domain	Statistic	Relevance to blue diplomacy	Peer-reviewed source (URL/DOI)
IORA institutional scale	23 member states	Region-wide agenda setting, but consensus costs and implementation variation	Islam (2023), <i>BISS Journal</i> , 44(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.56888/BISSj2023v44n1a1
Indian Ocean Commission membership	Five members (Comoros, France/Reunion, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles)	Small-state and island-state governance coalition with operational maritime programs	McDougall (2026), <i>Journal of the Indian Ocean Region</i> . https://doi.org/10.1080/19480881.2026.2618353
Bay of Bengal ecological scale	2.17 million sq. km	Huge governance surface for fisheries, ports, disaster risk, and conservation diplomacy	Islam (2025), <i>BISS Journal</i> , 46(1), 109–141. https://doi.org/10.56888/biiss-journal.v46i1.a925
Bay of Bengal biodiversity shares	8% of global mangroves; 12% of global coral reefs	Links blue economy to biodiversity diplomacy and SDG-aligned governance	Islam (2025), <i>BISS Journal</i> , 46(1), 109–141. https://doi.org/10.56888/biiss-journal.v46i1.a925
Blue economy GDP shares (selected BoB littorals)	3.2% (BD), 4.1% (IN), 3.5% (MM), 1.3% (LK), 22.6% (TH)	Uneven economic stakes shape bargaining positions and policy priorities	Islam (2025), <i>BISS Journal</i> , 46(1), 109–141. https://doi.org/10.56888/biiss-journal.v46i1.a925

Table 5: Institutional Foundations



4.3 The Indian Ocean Commission and Western Indian Ocean Governance

The Western Indian Ocean governance system depends on the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), which operates as an island-and-littoral organisation that executes maritime safety and security and environmental management functions (McDougall 2026). The IOC establishes blue diplomacy through its regional coordination work, which connects small island initiatives to international partners while letting member countries maintain their decision-making power (Bueger et al. 2025). The IOC has five members—Comoros, France/Reunion, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Seychelles—which creates a relatively compact institutional space where agreement can be easier than in broader bodies, even as capacity constraints remain significant (McDougall 2026). The Western Indian Ocean governance system develops through ocean agenda security measures because funding for security purposes and international partnerships enable organisations to shift their focus from development to security initiatives (Midlen 2025). The Western Indian Ocean region shows strong securitisation because its seafaring security programs and anti-piracy initiatives have historically drawn funding from international donors (Midlen 2025).

4.4 Overlapping Institutions, Fragmented Governance, and Regime Complexity

The Indian Ocean blue diplomacy functions as a regime complex system because various institutions with overlapping functions work together to handle maritime security, fisheries management, environmental protection, trade activities and disaster risk management (Bueger et al., 2025). Bueger and colleagues argue that maritime security governance operates as a decentralised system, which operates through multiple organisations that generate both innovative solutions and coordination problems (Bueger et al., 2025). The

administrative burden of fragmentation goes beyond administrative problems because overlapping systems create opportunities for forum shopping and project duplication and norm disputes when outside partners choose to financially support specific mechanisms (Bueger et al., 2025). Smaller states can benefit from regime complexity because they can build international relationships through multiple diplomatic channels while preventing dominance by one state or organisation (Bueger et al., 2025). The Indian Ocean maritime order needs analysis through institutional interactions that involve IORA, BIMSTEC, IOC, and the broader governance system, instead of viewing each institution as an independent entity (Bueger et al., 2025).

5. BLUE DIPLOMACY IN THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN

5.1 Strategic Importance of the Western Indian Ocean

The Western Indian Ocean (WIO) functions as a strategic connection point between the Red Sea–Gulf system and the Indo-Pacific maritime economy, which enables trade movement and maritime security risks and international power conflicts to occur within limited geographic areas (Verschuur, Lumma, & Hall, 2025). The WIO, above all other areas, gains geopolitical importance because maritime chokepoint disruptions create global supply chain risk transmission through the Strait of Hormuz, which handles approximately 13 per cent of worldwide shipping traffic and connected chokepoints (Verschuur et al., 2025). The coastal and island states use their ocean territory to establish security partnerships through their security partnerships and port financing and ocean governance standards (Benzaken, Adam, Virdin, & Voyer, 2024). The subregion's blue diplomacy operates within regime complexity because its multiple initiatives and coalitions do not merge into one maritime system (Bueger, Edmunds, & Stockbruegger, 2025). The strategic importance of the WIO extends beyond

naval operations to include its capacity to support institutional operations and financial activities because blue economy narratives serve as tools for both attracting investments and establishing legitimacy, while security risks require management (Cisneros-Montemayor, Croft, Issifu, Swartz, & Voyer, 2022).

5.2 Coastal and Island States: Seychelles, Mauritius, Madagascar, Comoros, Kenya, Tanzania

The small island and coastal states located in the WIO region practice "blue diplomacy" as a sovereignty strategy which enables them to extend their influence through their ocean governance capabilities (Benzaken et al., 2024). The literature presents Seychelles as a typical example of a "large ocean state" which implemented blue diplomacy through blended finance tools that enable sustainable development planning while conservation efforts proceed (Kılıç, 2024). The Seychelles blue bond functions as a US\$15 million financial instrument because it uses de-risking mechanisms to demonstrate that blue diplomacy can be implemented through financial systems

instead of using only diplomatic messages (Kılıç, 2024). The scholars contend that these instruments possess strategic importance because external guarantees together with concessional support will determine domestic governance priorities while establishing new types of policy-based conditions (Kılıç, 2024). The blue diplomacy process in WIO countries operates under various constraints because Kenya and Tanzania must balance their port-led economic development plans with the essential governance requirements of their critical port facilities and the economic relationships that connect their inland areas (Kunambi & Zheng, 2024). The study compares the two largest East African ports through a performance assessment which shows that Dar es Salaam achieved an average efficiency score of 96.7% and Mombasa reached 94.9% from 2016 to 2021, which demonstrates that governance and operational reforms must be implemented to maintain trade competitiveness throughout the WIO region (Kunambi & Zheng, 2024).

Table 2. Western Indian Ocean blue diplomacy—selected quantified indicators (peer-reviewed sources, 2024–2025)

Domain	Statistic (number/%)	Why it matters for blue diplomacy	Source (peer-reviewed URL/DOI)
Blue finance (Seychelles)	US\$15 million sovereign blue bond	Shows how blue diplomacy is operationalised through capital-market instruments and external guarantees	Kılıç (2024), <i>Marine Policy</i> , 160, 105927. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2024.105927
Port efficiency (Tanzania/Kenya)	Avg. efficiency 96.7% (Dar es Salaam); 94.9% (Mombasa) (2016–2021)	Links port governance to geoeconomic credibility and corridor bargaining power	Kunambi & Zheng (2024), <i>Logistics</i> , 8(1), 2. https://doi.org/10.3390/logistics8010002
Trade corridors & chokepoint exposure (regional context)	~13% of global maritime trade volume transits the Strait of Hormuz	Anchors WIO's strategic value in systemic energy-trade vulnerability and security externalities	Verschuur et al. (2025), <i>Nature Communications</i> , 16, 10421. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-025-65403-w



5.3 Maritime Security, Piracy, and Regional Maritime Architecture

Maritime security functions as the primary force driving WIO blue diplomacy because security threats create higher operational expenses, which lead nations to form international alliances that determine regional power dynamics (Bueger et al., 2025). The current research on contemporary piracy shows that piracy and armed robbery activities show different patterns that change throughout various times and different areas, and this situation requires maritime authorities to develop flexible risk management systems instead of using fixed "piracy waves" systems (He, Zhang, Guo, & Wang, 2023). The global piracy risk assessment, which uses the IMO GISIS dataset shows that the dataset contains over 4,000 incidents from 2006 to the present, which allows users to track changing danger zones and evolving risk characteristics (He et al., 2023). The Western Indian Ocean area faces security challenges from piracy because it serves as a negotiation space where naval forces from outside the region and their funding sources use it to support their operations through surveillance and capacity development (Bueger et al., 2025). The Western Indian Ocean maritime systems function as multiple security elements, which include naval patrol operations and information-sharing departments, and legal improvements and development activities, instead of existing as one unified security system (Bueger et al., 2025). The Western Indian Ocean area conducts blue diplomacy operations because it requires control over development-based security measures, which create funding streams for security operations to enhance surveillance and patrol systems while reducing support for sustainable development initiatives (Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2022).

5.4 Fisheries Governance, Marine Resources, and Blue Economy Policy

Fisheries governance represents the essential element that enables WIO blue diplomacy to function because coastal

communities depend on fisheries for their economic activities and dining options, while ocean governance regulations define which marine resources they can use (SriHari & Prasad, 2025). The Indian Ocean governs its fisheries management system according to research which shows that this ocean region produces about 15 per cent of worldwide marine capture fisheries and 20 per cent of global tuna output (SriHari & Prasad, 2025). The production shares establish a connection between WIO diplomacy and three international processes, which include market regulation, sustainability certification, and access arrangements that remain disputed because different states display varying capacities for governance (SriHari & Prasad, 2025). Pacific island states use blue economy strategies to create conservation-development linkages which enable them to obtain financial resources through their marine protected area commitments for diplomatic purposes (Benzaken et al., 2024). The research indicates that blue economy narratives need proper governance systems that use public participation, fair distribution, and effective enforcement to operate without creating social inequality through resource enclosure. The success of WIO blue diplomacy depends on states establishing legitimate fisheries governance which enables them to secure strategic alliances while maintaining financial and operational help without becoming financially dependent (Kılıç, 2024).

5.5 Port Development, External Powers, and Strategic Access

Maritime ports in the Western Indian Ocean region serve as vital economic assets because their port facilities enable them to control strategic supply routes, capital movement, and military access points (Gurjar, 2023). The Port of Berbera case demonstrates seaport geopolitics because it shows how Somaliland, Ethiopia, and the UAE use infrastructure development for both economic advantages and geopolitical interests (Gurjar, 2023). Gurjar's research shows that Berbera aims to become a Gulf of Aden transshipment hub because its modern upgrades attract international business, which changes

regional power relationships (Gurjar, 2023). The WIO port geopolitics demonstrates that foreign nations prefer to obtain access through their investments, which allow them to gain political power through commercial interests without needing to establish military bases (Gurjar, 2023). The geoeconomic logic of port economics research shows that ports operate as power centers which control global production networks through their regulatory abilities and strategic assets (Notteboom, Pallis, & Rodrigue, 2021). National credibility in trade facilitation, investor confidence, and regional leadership claims all depend on port performance, which makes port governance a key factor in WIO blue diplomacy (Kunambi & Zheng, 2024).

6. BLUE DIPLOMACY IN THE BAY OF BENGAL

6.1 Strategic Significance of the Bay of Bengal

The Bay of Bengal (BoB) serves as an important strategic area in the northeastern Indian Ocean which functions as an intersection point where trade routes, coastal protection needs, and political connections meet (Umesh, Kumar, & Shanas, 2021). Physical-geography scholarship identifies the Bay of Bengal as occupying 2,173,000 sq. km which demonstrates the governance responsibilities that BoB coastal areas face during disaster management and fisheries operations, and maritime infrastructure development (Umesh et al., 2021). The geographic scale of this area holds strategic significance because extensive maritime territories result in higher surveillance expenditures, while regional cooperation becomes essential for both maritime domain detection and environmental management activities (Umesh et al., 2021). Port network dynamics establish the Bay of Bengal as a central hub because it connects South Asian production and consumption areas with Southeast Asian shipping routes and broader Indo-Pacific maritime transportation networks (Munim, Hasan, Schramm, & Tusher, 2022). The BoB Blue diplomacy functions as development diplomacy, which supports trade development and

infrastructure development and security diplomacy, which emphasises risk control and strategic communication activities (Nanyam, Singh, & Roy, 2022).

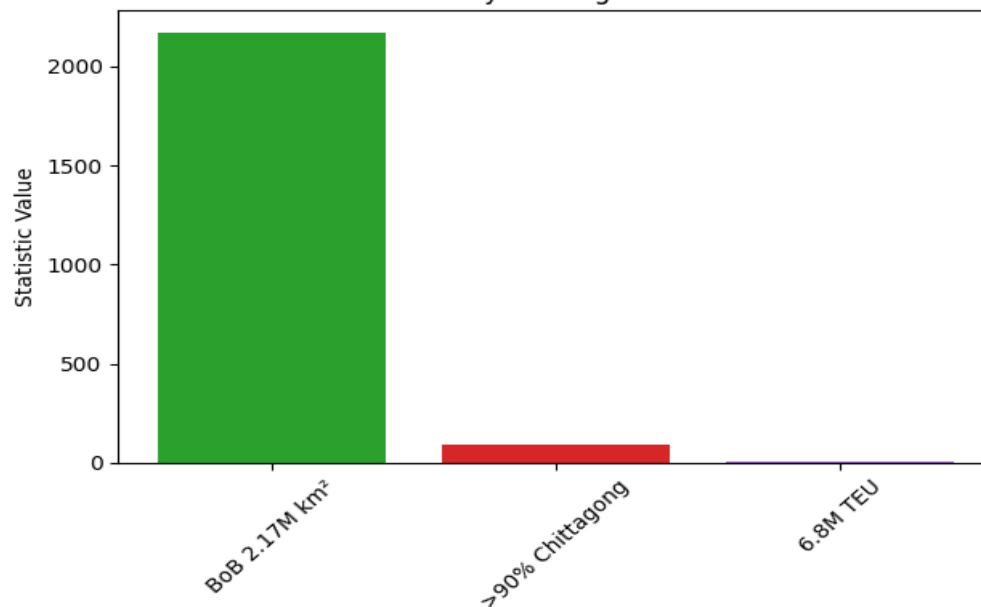
6.2 Key Littoral States: India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand

The blue diplomacy profiles of BoB littoral states show different patterns because their strategic needs require different approaches, which depend on their economic development and institutional resources (Munim et al., 2022). Bangladesh relies on its maritime system, which shows through its port network; new research indicates that Chittagong (Chattogram) port operates as a monopoly because it controls over 90 per cent of Bangladesh's international trade through its ports which makes port governance a crucial element for national economic protection (Munim et al., 2022). India's strategy for Bay of Bengal security incorporates both maritime protection programs and the development of port facilities and transit routes, while it connects its national growth plan with Indo-Pacific diplomatic initiatives (Nanyam et al., 2022). Sri Lanka serves as a transshipment hub that connects northern Indian Ocean shipping routes through its Colombo container network system, which acts as a primary hub whose operational efficiency determines the regional logistics system (Kavirathna, Kawasaki, Hanaoka, & Matsuda, 2021). Myanmar and Thailand establish a Southeast Asian connection to Bay-centred regionalism because their infrastructure and trade regulations shape the Bay's function as a link between South Asia and Southeast Asia (Nanyam et al., 2022). The different diplomatic approaches of BoB countries show that their blue diplomacy efforts start from development goals because their competition for investment opportunities and regulatory control creates permanent strategic influence on their operations (Kavirathna et al., 2021).

Table 3. Bay of Bengal blue diplomacy—selected quantified indicators (peer-reviewed sources, 2021–2025)

Domain	Statistic (number/%)	Why it matters for blue diplomacy	Source (peer-reviewed URL/DOI)
Geographic scale	Bay of Bengal area: 2,173,000 sq. km	Demonstrates governance scale (monitoring, disaster risk, resource regulation)	Umeh et al. (2021), <i>Ocean Engineering</i> , 235, 109385. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oceaneng.2021.109385
National trade concentration	Chittagong handles >90% of Bangladesh's international trade	Makes port governance a national security/development priority and a diplomatic issue	Munim et al. (2022), <i>Case Studies on Transport Policy</i> , 10(2), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cstp.2022.01.007
Port throughput capacity & trajectory (Sri Lanka)	Colombo container capacity: 6.8 million TEU (baseline), with expansion plans	Shows why hub-port competition and investment geopolitics shape BoB logistics order	Kavirathna et al. (2021), <i>The Asian Journal of Shipping and Logistics</i> . (Article preview lines cite TEU capacity). https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2213624X20301541

Table 7: Bay of Bengal Indicators



6.3 BIMSTEC, Connectivity, and Bay-Centred Regionalism

Bay-centred regionalism develops its framework through connectivity because transport corridors and port performance, and logistics integration determine which parties can negotiate their development results (Nanyam et al., 2022). The corridor system creates its own political dynamics because it determines which groups receive international support and which groups rely on that support (Kavirathna et al., 2021). The BIMSTEC cooperation narratives describe trade facilitation and sectoral integration as their primary focus, whereas research shows that states implement these programs through their existing capacities and national goals (Konwer, 2025). Bay-centered regionalism emerges through national projects that interact with subregional institutions and extra-regional partnerships to create both synergies and regime complexity (Bueger et al., 2025). Blue diplomacy operates as an issue-linkage platform in this context, which allows states to combine their security agreements with their development initiatives and environmental protection obligations (Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2022).

6.4 Ports, Corridors, and Maritime Infrastructure Competition

The BoB region serves as an important geoeconomic theater for port competition because shipping lines choose their hubs and the transshipment process controls national income and region-wide connectivity and military power (Kavirathna et al., 2021). A Sri Lanka port competition study reports that Colombo's throughput is heavily transshipment-based, estimating that 75% of Colombo's throughput involves transshipment, which underscores how hub dependence can generate volatility and strategic sensitivity (Kavirathna et al., 2021). The geopolitical importance of infrastructure competition arises when external funding and strategic narratives connect to port development projects, which Rosendal (2026) demonstrates through research

that shows how port construction affects national economic development and international political alignment. The assessment of BoB port governance now uses "green port" and sustainability criteria, while research shows that environmental management functions as a critical weakness despite strong network connectivity (Munim et al., 2022). Corridor competition creates a situation where geoeconomics meets governance standards because states attempt to attract investors while maintaining control over their territorial integrity and governmental authority (Notteboom et al., 2021).

6.5 Blue Economy, Security, and Developmental Aspirations

The blue economy discourse in BoB takes developmental job creation and economic expansion, and logistics efficiency through its various dimensions, but research shows that the establishment of "blue growth" programs depends on the quality of governance (Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2022). The Chattogram throughput study presents capacity challenges that affect decisions on dry ports and intermodal systems and regulatory changes because it reports a 3.27 mTEU throughput for 2024 (Saha, 2025). The process of developing aspirations creates security risks because port congestion, weak environmental regulations, and unregulated coastal development lead to political unrest and threats to organisational reputation (Munim et al., 2022). The blue diplomacy of BoB seeks to achieve dual legitimacy through its domestic growth objectives and international sustainability goals while handling external pressure from investment and geopolitical alignment (Rosendal, 2026). The current situation demonstrates that blue diplomacy functions as a negotiation process that multiple parties use to settle their disputes about access rights, operational procedures, and the benefits derived from maritime development activities (Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2022).

7. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN VS BAY OF BENGAL

7.1 Similarities in Maritime Vulnerabilities and Strategic Opportunity

The two subregions suffer from structural vulnerabilities because their chokepoints and port nodes create economic value distribution patterns that enable political authorities to impose diplomatic costs during times of disruption (Verschuur et al., 2025). The two regions face new threats to their maritime security because piracy research demonstrates that piracy danger shows changing patterns which necessitate different security approaches (He et al., 2023). The two subregions use blue economy narratives to gain financial resources and international recognition, but scholars argue that blue economy strategies will create greater environmental damage and social inequity because they lack fair distribution and proper implementation (Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2022). The two areas face a critical diplomatic issue which requires them to find a common approach for maintaining security while developing their economy and protecting the environment amid ongoing competition and climate change impacts (Bueger et al., 2025).

7.2 Differences in Institutional Density and Regional Leadership

The institutional setup between WIO and BoB shows different approaches because WIO uses small island country alliances and project-based governance, while BoB uses extensive population-based regionalism that prioritises connectivity relationships (Konwer, 2025). The WIO island-state diplomatic activities focus on financial innovation and conservation-development linkages, which the Seychelles blue bond approach exemplifies (Kılıç, 2024). The BoB diplomatic activities concentrate on logistics and port operations and trade support activities, for which Chittagong Port serves as a key element for Bangladesh's international trade operations (Munim et al., 2022). The major powers of the BoB, particularly India, control agenda-setting more than WIO island states, which depend on niche leadership and global partnerships due to their low hard power (Benzaken et al., 2024).

7.3 Small Island States vs Major Littoral Powers

Small island states achieve blue diplomacy through norm entrepreneurship and financial innovation, which enables them to transform their environmental leadership into funding and partnership opportunities (Benzaken et al., 2024). The major

littoral powers enact blue diplomacy through their development of infrastructure and corridor strategy and naval-security initiatives, which connect ocean space to their larger strategic framework (Nanyam et al., 2022). The island-state approach is well illustrated by Seychelles' finance-governance coupling, where a modest-sized bond becomes strategically meaningful due to its signalling and governance conditionalities (Kılıç, 2024). The major-power approach is illustrated by Bay of Bengal port and corridor politics, where hub competitiveness and connectivity decisions shape the distribution of economic gains and strategic dependencies (Kavirathna et al., 2021).

7.4 Security-Driven Blue Diplomacy and Development-Driven Blue Diplomacy

At The WIO. The Western Indian Ocean blue diplomacy operates through security frameworks that extend beyond its development programs due to its history with piracy and its need to protect critical maritime routes. The Bay of Bengal blue diplomacy operates through development initiatives that focus on national agendas to resolve port congestion, improve trade processes, and solve infrastructure problems that arise during strategic competition (Munim et al., 2022). The two regions differ in their strategic investment patterns because they both face environmental pressures that impact their climate change responses (Verschuur et al., 2025). The two subregions use different blue diplomacy entry points because WIO blue finance innovation and BoB throughput and port governance pressure serve as empirical indicators between the two regions (Kılıç, 2024; Saha, 2025).

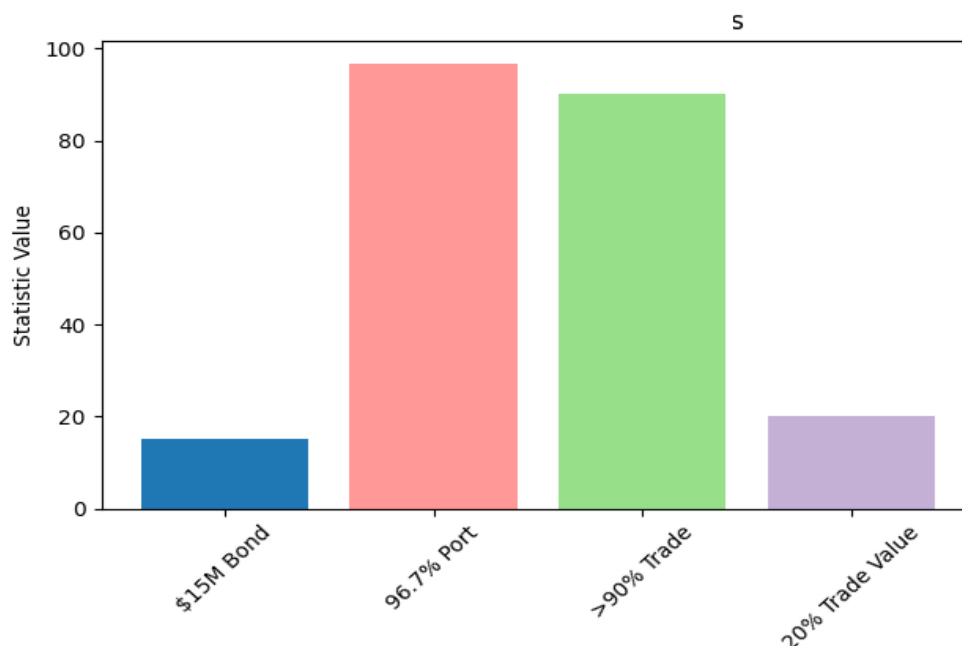
7.5 Comparative Patterns of External Power Engagement

Port investment and standards influence serve as the primary methods through which both regions engage with external powers while showing how Indo-Pacific geopolitics shape logistics operations in the area (Notteboom et al., 2021). Gulf actors use infrastructure development and access politics to modernise Berbera port and establish new alliances through their activities in the Western Indian Ocean region (Gurjar, 2023). The Hambantota case study shows how competing development models and sovereignty and dependency battles shape port development in the region (Rosendal, 2026). Geoeconomic instruments operate as the primary method through which external entities engage with both subregions because they use investment, logistics integration, and governance standards to achieve their objectives, which extend beyond military bases (Notteboom et al., 2021).

Table 4. Comparative synthesis—Western Indian Ocean vs Bay of Bengal (peer-reviewed quantified anchors, 2021–2025)

Comparative axis	Western Indian Ocean (WIO) quantified anchor	Bay of Bengal (BoB) quantified anchor	Interpretive implication	Source links
Finance as diplomacy	Seychelles blue bond US\$15m	—	WIO island states use finance instruments to institutionalise	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2024.105927

			blue diplomacy	
Port governance stakes	Port efficiency avg. 96.7% (Dar); 94.9% (Mombasa)	Chittagong handles >90% of national trade	WIO emphasises corridor gateways; BoB shows extreme national trade concentration in one port	https://doi.org/10.3390/logistics8010002 ; https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cstp.2022.01.007
Spatial governance scale	—	Bay area 2,173,000 sq. km	Monitoring and disaster governance scale raise coordination costs and policy complexity	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oceaneng.2021.109385
Systemic chokepoint exposure	~13% global maritime trade volume via Hormuz	~20% global maritime trade value via Taiwan+Malacca (system context)	Both subregions are embedded in chokepoint-driven vulnerability and leverage	https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-025-65403-w



8. PORT GEOPOLITICS AND MARITIME INFRASTRUCTURE

8.1 Ports as Instruments of Geoeconomic Statecraft

Ports function as geoeconomic statecraft tools because they serve as regulatory areas that enable states to control trade operations through their power to manage cross-border trade movement and their ability to establish trade relationships (Notteboom et al., 2021). Port geopolitics has developed into an analytical framework which examines how investments in operational control over ports can create power that functions similarly to military bases (Gurjar, 2023). The WIO and BoB both experience port projects that create "dual-use" security concerns because their commercial deep-water facilities enable naval operations to proceed without official base agreements (Rosendal, 2026). The political economy of ports serves as the main element that determines blue diplomacy efforts because port performance and governance credibility affect investment,

insurance, and supply-chain resilience decisions (Kunambi & Zheng, 2024). The tendency of port systems to concentrate their operations develops into a stronger pattern because Bangladesh experiences national economic impacts from Chittagong's operational dominance (Munim et al., 2022).

8.2 Seaport Development and Shipping Networks

The development of seaports establishes shipping network hierarchies because carriers choose hubs based on their assessment of capacity, turnaround efficiency, hinterland connectivity, and regulatory enactment (Kavirathna et al., 2021). The transshipment hub function of Colombo demonstrates that network centrality delivers strategic advantages which advance operational strength while exposing the network to market fluctuations and competitive threats (Kavirathna et al., 2021). The comparative port studies from East Africa demonstrate that port efficiency ratings change throughout time and external

trade activities create changes that require ports to adapt their operational methods according to new network conditions (Kunambi & Zheng, 2024). Shipping network scholarship therefore supports the view that ports are not merely national assets but regional nodes whose performance has cross-border implications for landlocked states and corridor economies (Kunambi & Zheng, 2024).

8.3 Maritime Corridors, Logistics, and Trade Resilience

Trade resilience is increasingly defined as a network-based concept because the system-wide effects of disruptions depend on three factors, including corridor redundancy, chokepoint exposure and the capacity to use alternate routes (Verschuur et al., 2025). Corridor-adjacent states can increase their bargaining power through corridor reliability and redundancy delivery while also taking on greater security and climate-risk responsibilities (Verschuur et al., 2025). The resilience agenda shows up in domestic discussions about dry ports and intermodal systems for BoB states because these systems will help decrease congestion and enhance throughput reliability (Saha, 2025). WIO states establish resilience through security partnerships and information-sharing systems, which serve to decrease piracy risks while safeguarding navigation (Bueger et al., 2025). Blue diplomacy serves as a method to establish how resilience costs and benefits will be shared between parties, which includes infrastructure funding and governance changes (Notteboom et al., 2021).

8.4 Strategic Competition Around Access, Investment, and Influence

Strategic competition for control over ports develops through three main methods, which include investment packages and long-term concessions, and the political battles that determine whether infrastructure functions as development partnerships or strategic advancements (Rosendal, 2026). The WIO region uses Berbera's modernisation, which shows how Gulf nations use their investments to change regional power dynamics while developing new trade routes that create special economic ties with Ethiopia (Gurjar, 2023). The research on Sri Lanka's port development, which exists in the BoB area, shows how different ports use their investment resources to create unique operational processes that enhance Colombo's status as a central hub while establishing Hambantota as a site for particular services (Kavirathna et al., 2021). Port users now evaluate sustainability and service quality as essential elements that determine their preferences for port services which function as standard competition between "green port" practices and digitalisation and operational governance methods (Munim et al., 2022). Organisations acquire power through financial means while they also gain authority through their capacity to create standards and evaluate their performance according to established benchmarks (Notteboom et al., 2021).

8.5 Implications for Sovereignty and Regional Balance of Power

Port-centric geoeconomics establishes permanent requirements that control strategic infrastructure through governance terms, which generate political conflicts over domestic control of

essential resources (Rosendal, 2026). The design of port projects creates unbalanced negotiation power for small states because debt exposure and concession agreements limit their ability to make decisions about policy matters, while infrastructure development improves their ability to connect with other regions (Kılıç, 2024). Port geopolitics creates new opportunities for major littoral powers to control strategic corridors and establish their logistical superiority while manipulating the trade relations of nearby nations (Kunambi & Zheng, 2024). The central theoretical implication is that sovereignty today is often exercised through infrastructure governance—regulation, contract design, standards enforcement—rather than only through territorial control or naval presence (Notteboom et al., 2021). Blue diplomacy, in this sense, is a struggle over the rules and institutions that govern maritime space, and port geopolitics is one of its most material expressions (Bueger et al., 2025).

9. CONCLUSION

The current practice of blue diplomacy within the Indian Ocean Rim involves three elements, including climate risk effects, maritime security management, and the rising geoeconomic competition for ports and trade routes (Bueger et al., 2025). Climate diplomacy becomes a mandatory process because scientists observed sea-level rise at an annual rate of 3.7 millimetres from 2006 to 2018, and 44.1 million people in Asia Pacific live within 1 meter of sea level, thus making adaptation necessary for regional political systems (IPCC, 2021; Monioudi et al., 2025). The environmental governance situation needs to handle about 11 million tons of plastic waste that leaks into the ocean every year and the presence of microplastic throughout the ocean because these issues have become a fundamental requirement for validating all blue economy environmental protection stories (Bertolazzi et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025). The ongoing political competition between major powers will shape ocean governance systems yet the current battle centres on the management of infrastructure and the establishment of operational norms instead of exclusively focusing on military deployments (Notteboom et al., 2021). The Indian approach depends on its adaptable vision frameworks, which include SAGAR and IPOI, to establish partnerships, whereas China increases its presence through the strategic display of its Djibouti military base and its port-based operational network (Kupriyanov, 2022; Pertiwi & Perwita, 2021). The Western Indian Ocean island states and the Bay of Bengal coastal nations will achieve strategic independence through their capability to establish legitimate security alliances that will support climate adaptation efforts (Benzaken et al., 2024). The study demonstrates that countries achieve sustainable regional order through governance systems that combine three essential elements: maritime diplomacy to develop trade resilience and ecosystem protection, and community-centred development (Cisneros-Montemayor et al., 2022).

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