Russia’s Growing Strategic Interest in the Indian Ocean

1) Introduction
- Russia is located far from the Indian Ocean, but the region has always played an important role in the country’s strategy.
- During the Soviet times, Moscow maintained steady presence in the Indian Ocean, including naval presence.
- After the collapse of the Soviet union, its attention to the region decreased.
- In the latest decade Moscow is coming back to the Indian Ocean.

2) Recent Developments
- Over the last few years, China and Russia have conducted naval manoeuvres in the Western Pacific, the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean.
- Recently, Russian and China conducted a trilateral naval exercise with South Africa in the strategic waters off the Cape of Good Hope.
- This is the first time that the three countries conducted a joint exercise.
- The exercise reflects the growing weight of China and Russia in South Africa’s security calculus.
- Iran has said that it plans to hold joint naval drills with Russia and China in the turbulent waters of the Persian Gulf.
- Recently, Perekop, a training vessel of the Russian Navy, arrived at the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka.

3) Russia’s return to the Indian Ocean
- Russia’s return to the Indian Ocean must be seen as a part of its new strategic activism in the Middle East and Africa.
- Russia is a vast continental state and its limited access to the sea remains vulnerable to exploitation by its adversaries.
- Russia has the capacity to shape the strategic outcomes in the region.
- Any conflict in the Indian Ocean will have long-lasting repercussions and would eventually affect Russia.
- Moscow is one of the world’s major arms exporters and has turned that into an effective leverage in the Indian Ocean region.
- Russia has stepped up its naval diplomacy in the region, making regular visits to ports in the region and deepening special relationships that it already has with countries like India.

4) Benefits
- Russia could serve as a security provider in the region with regard to anti-piracy, anti-terrorism and anti-trafficking.
- It can assist regional states in developing their own capacities in these areas.
- Russian navy could also contribute to disaster-relief operations in the Indian Ocean.
- Russian activism in the Indian Ocean should be a welcome addition to the emerging multipolarity in the region.
5) **India’s Actions**
- Until now, Delhi’s discourse on the Indian Ocean has been focused on the growing competition with China.
- This has led to the rapid expansion of India’s naval cooperation with the United States and Japan.
- As well as with its regional partners like Indonesia, Singapore and other ASEAN countries in the east, many nations in the Gulf as well as the east coast of Africa.
- India has been developing a partnership with France, a traditional security provider in the Western Indian Ocean.
- India would also want to develop similar intensive engagement with Britain and the European Union.

6) **Concerns / Challenges**
- Moscow’s deepening tensions with the West and growing strategic embrace of Beijing do pose problems for India’s own strategy.
- Implications of the emerging Sino-Russian naval and maritime partnership.

7) **Way Forward**
- Delhi needs to engage with Moscow on the unfolding Sino-Russian naval partnership.
- Delhi needs an early and intensive dialogue with Moscow on its Indian Ocean collaboration with China.