

India's Revised Coastline and Its Significance: Implications for Maritime Governance, Geopolitics, and the Blue Economy

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Abstract : India's maritime domain has become increasingly important in supporting national security, economic development, and regional cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Recognising the need for accurate coastal information, the Government of India revised the country's official coastline from 7,516.6 km to 11,098.81 km using modern hydrographic surveys and standardised geospatial methodologies. This study examines the significance of the revised coastline by analysing its geographical, legal, strategic, economic, and governance dimensions. The study adopts a qualitative research approach based on secondary data collected from official government publications, policy documents, legal instruments, and relevant scholarly literature. The findings indicate that the revised coastline does not alter India's maritime boundaries or sovereign rights under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS); rather, it provides a more accurate geospatial foundation for maritime governance. The revised measurement strengthens coastal planning, infrastructure development, disaster risk management, marine resource administration, and evidence-based policymaking. The analysis further highlights that accurate coastal information supports India's broader maritime objectives, including maritime security, regional cooperation, and the sustainable development of the Blue Economy. The study concludes that the revised coastline should be understood not merely as a revised geographical figure but as a strategic governance resource that enhances India's capacity to manage its coastal and maritime domains while reinforcing its role as a responsible maritime nation in the Indian Ocean Region.

Index Terms - India; Coastline Revision; Maritime Governance; UNCLOS; Indian Ocean Region; Blue Economy; Maritime Security; Geospatial Information

INTRODUCTION

The maritime domain has become increasingly important in shaping global trade, economic development, environmental governance, and international security. Oceans are no longer viewed merely as physical boundaries but as vital corridors for trade, energy transportation, resource exploration, and strategic connectivity. As global attention shifts towards the Indo-Pacific, maritime governance has gained greater importance in ensuring sustainable development, protecting marine resources, and maintaining regional stability. Consequently, coastal states are strengthening their maritime capabilities through accurate geospatial information, effective legal frameworks, and integrated ocean governance.

India occupies a strategically important position in this evolving maritime landscape. Located at the centre of the northern Indian

Ocean, it connects major sea routes linking the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and East Asia. Its extensive coastline, island territories, and maritime zones support international trade, fisheries, offshore resources, port-led development, and maritime security. According to the Indian Maritime Security Strategy (2026) and the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, India's growing economic and strategic interests make reliable coastal information essential for effective maritime governance and sustainable development.

Recognising this need, the Government of India, through the Survey of India (SoI), the National Hydrographic Office (NHO), and the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, revised the country's official coastline from 7,516.6 km to 11,098.81 km using modern hydrographic surveys, Geographic Information System (GIS) technology, and standardised geospatial methods. The revised measurement provides a more accurate representation of India's coastal geography for coastal planning, infrastructure development, disaster risk management, environmental monitoring, and maritime administration. Although the revision does not alter India's maritime boundaries or sovereign rights under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1982), it strengthens the scientific and administrative foundation for managing India's coastal and maritime domains.

Against this background, the present study examines the significance of India's revised official coastline by analysing its geographical, legal, strategic, economic, and governance dimensions. Drawing upon official government publications, the Indian Maritime Security Strategy, and the UNCLOS framework, the study evaluates the relationship between the revised coastline, India's maritime profile, geopolitical significance, regional maritime cooperation, and the Blue Economy. It argues that the revised coastline should be understood not merely as an updated geographical measurement but as a strategic geospatial foundation that strengthens maritime governance, supports evidence-based policymaking, and contributes to India's long-term maritime development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Painter and Jeffrey (2009) describe political geography as the study of the relationship between politics and geographical space through concepts such as power, territory, and governance. Their work provides a useful theoretical foundation but does not consider the role of modern geospatial technologies in maritime governance. Similarly, Flint (2022) explains geopolitics as the use of geographical space to advance state interests and strategic objectives. Although he highlights the influence of geography on state power and foreign policy, the study does not address coastal geospatial information or revised coastline mapping. Forbes (1995) examines maritime boundaries in the Indian Ocean from legal and strategic perspectives, emphasising the importance of coastal baselines and state sovereignty. Likewise, Talukdar (1990) highlights the significance of India's coastline and island territories in maritime boundary management. However, both studies focus primarily on boundary delimitation rather than the governance implications of revised coastline measurements.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1982) establishes the legal framework for maritime zones and coastal state jurisdiction but does not consider how advances in geospatial mapping can strengthen maritime governance. Similarly, the Indian Maritime Security Strategy (2015; 2026) highlights maritime security, domain awareness, and regional cooperation, while publications by the Survey of India (SoI), National Hydrographic Office (NHO), and the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (2025) explain the methodology used to revise India's official coastline. These official documents primarily focus on technical measurement rather than its wider legal, strategic, and economic implications.

Policy studies by the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) further examine initiatives such as SAGAR, MAHASAGAR, IORA, IONS, and the Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), emphasising regional cooperation and the Blue Economy. However, they do not explore how the revised coastline contributes to these initiatives through improved geospatial governance.

RESEARCH GAP

Existing literature has extensively examined political geography, geopolitics, maritime law, maritime security, and the Blue Economy, while government publications have documented the methodology behind India's coastline revision. However, limited research integrates the revised official coastline with maritime governance, UNCLOS, geopolitical strategy, regional cooperation, and the Blue Economy within a single analytical framework. This study addresses that gap by evaluating the geographical, legal, strategic, and governance significance of India's revised coastline and its implications for evidence-based maritime policymaking and sustainable maritime development.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study aims to:

1. To examine the revision of India's official coastline and the methodology adopted for its reassessment.
2. To analyse the geographical and legal significance of the revised coastline in the context of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
3. To evaluate the implications of the revised coastline for India's maritime governance, geopolitical position, and maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region.
4. To assess the role of the revised coastline in strengthening regional maritime cooperation and supporting the sustainable development of the Blue Economy.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on secondary data to examine the significance of India's revised official coastline and its implications for maritime governance. Data were collected from authoritative sources, including publications of the Survey of India (SoI), National Hydrographic Office (NHO), Indian Maritime Security Strategy (2015 and 2026), United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1982), Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), and other Government of India publications and scholarly literature.

The study employs qualitative content analysis to examine themes such as India's maritime profile, the revised coastline, UNCLOS, geopolitical significance, maritime security, regional cooperation, and the Blue Economy. The analysis is descriptive and analytical, focusing on interpreting published documents rather than conducting field surveys or independent geospatial measurements. Accordingly, the findings are limited to documentary research based on secondary sources.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

India's Maritime Profile

India's maritime profile is shaped by its strategic location in the northern Indian Ocean, where major sea routes connecting Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and East Asia converge. This geographical position has historically facilitated trade and cultural

exchange and continues to strengthen India's role in regional security, economic cooperation, and the Indo-Pacific maritime order. As maritime affairs gain greater strategic importance, India's coastal and oceanic geography has become a key element of its foreign policy, economic development, and national security.

The Government of India recently revised the country's official coastline to 11,098.81 km, highlighting the growing importance of accurate geospatial information in maritime governance. Prepared using modern hydrographic surveys and geospatial technologies, the revised measurement provides a more comprehensive representation of India's coastal geography. Although it does not alter India's legal maritime boundaries, it strengthens the scientific basis for coastal planning, infrastructure development, disaster risk management, and marine resource governance.

India's coastline extends across nine coastal states and four Union Territories, bordering the Arabian Sea to the west and the Bay of Bengal to the east. It also includes the strategically important Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep, which expand India's maritime reach in the Indian Ocean Region. These coastal and island territories support ports, fisheries, tourism, offshore energy, and naval operations, making them vital to the country's economy and maritime security.

Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), India exercises sovereign rights over several maritime zones, including the Territorial Sea, Contiguous Zone, Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and Continental Shelf. These maritime areas provide access to marine resources while strengthening India's capacity to protect sea lines of communication and promote a secure and sustainable Indo-Pacific. Therefore, India's maritime profile extends beyond its physical coastline and reflects the combined significance of geography, maritime governance, economic development, and strategic interests. In this context, the revised coastline provides a stronger geospatial foundation for informed policymaking and effective coastal management.

Revision of India's Official Coastline

For many years, the official length of India's coastline was recorded as 7,516.6 km and was widely used for administrative and planning purposes. However, advances in geospatial technology and coastal mapping highlighted the need for a more accurate and standardised measurement. The earlier estimate was based on older techniques that could not fully capture the complexity of India's coastline, particularly its estuaries, creeks, river mouths, and island systems.

To address these limitations, the Government of India initiated a comprehensive reassessment of the country's coastline under the guidance of the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) in collaboration with the National Hydrographic Office (NHO), the Survey of India (SoI), and other central and state agencies. The objective was not to redefine India's territorial extent but to establish a scientifically consistent and uniform methodology for measuring the coastline across all coastal states and Union Territories.

The reassessment employed modern geospatial techniques, including Geographic Information System (GIS), High-Water Line (HWL) datasets, Electronic Navigation Charts (ENCs), and the WGS-84 geodetic reference system. Standardised procedures ensured the consistent measurement of coastal features such as estuaries, creeks, river mouths, and islands, resulting in a more accurate representation of India's coastal geography.

Based on this methodology, the official length of India's coastline was revised from 7,516.6 km to 11,098.81 km. The revised figure was approved by the Coastal Protection and Development Advisory Committee (CPDAC) after consultation with all coastal States and Union Territories and was formally notified by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways in April 2025. The revision reflects improvements in measurement techniques rather than any physical expansion of India's land territory or maritime space. The revised state-wise coastline is presented in Table 1.

The revised coastline provides a stronger geospatial foundation for coastal planning, port and infrastructure development, disaster risk management, environmental monitoring, and marine resource management. Although it does not alter India's maritime boundaries or maritime entitlements under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), it improves the quality of spatial information available for evidence-based policymaking and long-term maritime planning. Therefore, the revision should be viewed not merely as a technical update but as an important advancement in India's coastal governance framework.

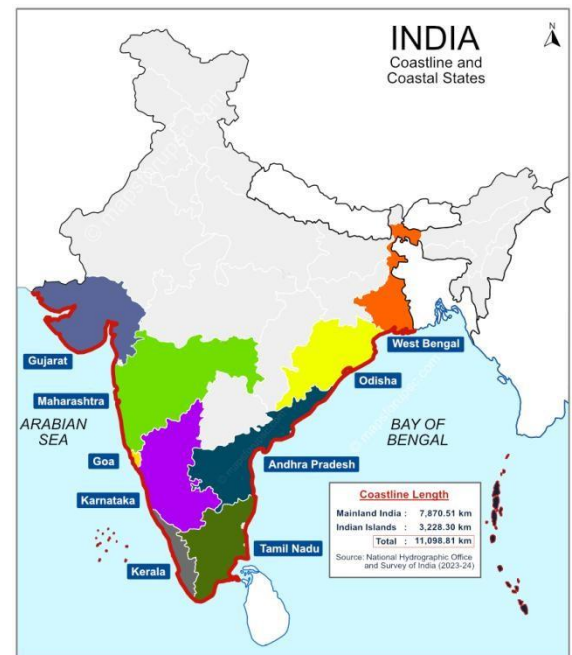


Table 1 : State-Wise Coastline

State / UT	Old Coastline (km)	Revised Coastline (km)
Gujarat	1,214.70	2,340.62
Tamil Nadu	906.9	1,068.69
Andhra Pradesh	973.7	1,053.07
Maharashtra	652.6	877.97
West Bengal	157.5	721.02
Kerala	569.7	600.15
Odisha	476.4	574.71
Karnataka	280	343.3
Goa	160.5	193.95
Daman & Diu	160.5	54.38
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	1,962.00	3,083.50
Lakshadweep	132	144.8
Puducherry	30.6	42.65
Total (India)	7,516.60	11,098.81

Source: Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (2025).

UNCLOS and India's Maritime Boundaries

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), 1982 establishes the legal framework governing the rights and responsibilities of coastal states over their maritime zones. As a State Party, India exercises its maritime rights in accordance with the Convention, which defines maritime jurisdiction and the management of marine resources.

Under UNCLOS, India has four principal maritime zones: the Territorial Sea (12 nautical miles), Contiguous Zone (24 nautical miles), Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (200 nautical miles), and the Continental Shelf, each providing specific sovereign rights and jurisdiction over maritime activities.

The revision of India's official coastline from 7,516.6 km to 11,098.81 km does not alter these maritime zones or India's sovereign rights under UNCLOS, as maritime entitlements are determined by legally recognised baselines, not by the total length of the coastline. Instead, the revision is a scientific and geospatial update that improves the accuracy of coastal mapping and supports coastal planning, marine spatial planning, disaster management, environmental monitoring, and maritime governance.

Therefore, the revised coastline should be viewed as an administrative and geospatial improvement that strengthens evidence-based maritime governance while remaining fully consistent with the legal framework established under UNCLOS.

Geopolitical Significance

India's revised official coastline has significance beyond improved geographical measurement. Although the revision does not modify India's maritime boundaries under UNCLOS, it strengthens the geospatial foundation for maritime governance, strategic planning, and regional engagement. As the Indian Ocean becomes increasingly important in global geopolitics, accurate coastal information supports India's efforts to safeguard national interests, enhance maritime security, and promote sustainable economic development.

India's Contribution as an Economic Power

India's strategic location along major international sea lanes make the maritime domain central to its economic growth. Nearly 95% of India's international trade by volume and around 70% by value is transported through maritime routes, highlighting the country's dependence on sea-based commerce. With 12 major ports and over 200 non-major ports, the maritime sector supports international trade, energy imports, fisheries, tourism, and offshore resource development, making it a key contributor to India's economy. The revision of India's official coastline from 7,516.6 km to 11,098.81 km provides more accurate geospatial information for coastal infrastructure planning, port-led development, logistics, and marine resource management. Improved coastal mapping also strengthens initiatives such as Sagarmala by supporting evidence-based planning, attracting investment, and promoting the sustainable use of marine resources. Consequently, the revised coastline contributes to India's long-term economic growth by enhancing maritime governance and advancing the Blue Economy.

Strategic Competition and Maritime Security

The Indian Ocean Region has become a focal point of strategic competition because of its critical sea lines of communication, growing energy flows, and geopolitical importance. In this environment, India seeks to ensure a secure, stable, and rules-based maritime order while protecting its maritime interests and coastal assets. Accurate coastal information plays an important role in supporting maritime domain awareness, coastal surveillance, naval operations, disaster response, and maritime law enforcement. Although the revised coastline does not expand India's jurisdiction, it improves the quality of geospatial data available for coastal security and maritime administration. Better spatial information enhances coordination among maritime agencies and supports informed decision-making in addressing traditional and non-traditional maritime security challenges, including piracy, smuggling, illegal fishing, and natural disasters.

Regional and Global Maritime Cooperation

India's maritime strategy extends beyond national security to active participation in regional and global maritime cooperation. As the leading maritime power in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), India promotes a secure, stable, and inclusive maritime order through multilateral initiatives that strengthen maritime security, disaster response, information sharing, capacity building, and sustainable ocean governance. While the revision of the official coastline does not directly alter these initiatives, it provides more reliable geospatial information that supports effective coastal management and maritime policymaking.

(a) SAGAR and MAHASAGAR-

India's maritime vision is guided by the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) initiative, introduced in 2015 to promote regional security, economic cooperation, capacity building, and sustainable use of marine resources. Building on this approach, MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions) expands India's vision by encouraging broader maritime partnerships, resilient supply chains, and collaborative ocean governance across the Indo-Pacific. Together, these initiatives reflect India's commitment to a cooperative and rules-based maritime order.

(b) Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)-

India is a founding member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), which promotes regional cooperation in maritime safety, the Blue Economy, trade, fisheries, disaster risk management, and academic collaboration. Through IORA, India supports sustainable economic development while strengthening institutional cooperation among Indian Ocean littoral states.

(c) Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)

The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) provides a platform for naval cooperation among countries of the Indian Ocean Region. It facilitates dialogue, professional exchanges, joint exercises, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and confidence-building measures, thereby enhancing collective maritime security and operational coordination.

(d) Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)

The Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) serves as a regional hub for maritime information sharing and maritime domain awareness. By facilitating the exchange of real-time information among partner countries, the centre supports efforts to combat piracy, illegal fishing, and other transnational maritime threats while improving coordination during emergencies and disaster response.

Regional and global maritime cooperation remains an essential component of India's maritime strategy. In this context, the revised coastline strengthens the geospatial foundation for coastal governance and complements India's broader efforts to promote maritime security, sustainable development, and regional collaboration in the Indian Ocean Region.

Blue Economy

The Blue Economy has emerged as a key component of India's maritime strategy by promoting the sustainable use of marine resources for economic growth, environmental conservation, and social development. With an extensive coastline, island territories, and a vast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), India possesses significant potential in sectors such as fisheries, aquaculture, maritime transport, tourism, offshore renewable energy, seabed resources, and the marine biotechnology industry. Sustainable development of these sectors is essential for enhancing economic resilience while protecting marine ecosystems.

The revision of India's official coastline provides more accurate geospatial information for marine spatial planning, coastal infrastructure development, fisheries management, environmental monitoring, and disaster risk reduction. Reliable coastal data also supports evidence-based policymaking and improves coordination among agencies responsible for managing coastal and marine resources. Although the revised coastline does not directly increase marine resources or maritime entitlements, it strengthens the scientific foundation for their efficient and sustainable management.

As India seeks to expand its maritime economy, integrating economic development with environmental sustainability will remain essential. In this context, the revised coastline contributes to the long-term objectives of the Blue Economy by supporting informed planning, sustainable resource utilisation, and effective coastal governance.

FINDINGS

The revision of India's official coastline from 7,516.6 km to 11,098.81 km represents a significant advancement in the country's coastal mapping and geospatial database. The study shows that the revised measurement results from improved hydrographic surveys and standardised geospatial techniques rather than any physical or legal expansion of India's territory. Consequently, the revision does not alter India's maritime boundaries or sovereign rights under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

The analysis further demonstrates that the revised coastline has important implications for maritime governance. More accurate coastal information strengthens coastal planning, infrastructure development, marine spatial planning, disaster management, environmental protection, and resource management. It also enhances the quality of evidence available for policymaking and supports India's broader maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean Region.

The study also finds that the revised coastline complements India's geopolitical objectives by supporting maritime security, regional cooperation, and the sustainable development of the Blue Economy. Although primarily a scientific and administrative revision, it provides a stronger geospatial foundation for integrated coastal management and long-term maritime development.

CONCLUSION

India's revised official coastline marks an important milestone in strengthening the country's maritime governance framework. By updating the official coastline from 7,516.6 km to 11,098.81 km through modern hydrographic surveys and geospatial technologies, the Government of India has established a more accurate representation of the nation's coastal geography. The revision reflects methodological improvements in coastline measurement rather than any change in India's territorial extent or maritime jurisdiction under UNCLOS.

The study demonstrates that accurate coastal data has significance beyond geographical measurement. It supports effective coastal planning, infrastructure development, disaster risk reduction, environmental conservation, marine resource management, and evidence-based policymaking. Furthermore, improved geospatial information strengthens India's maritime strategy by enhancing coastal administration, maritime security, regional cooperation, and the sustainable development of the Blue Economy.

As maritime affairs continue to shape economic growth and geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific, reliable geospatial information will become increasingly important for coastal states. In this context, India's revised coastline provides a stronger scientific and administrative foundation for integrated maritime governance and sustainable ocean development. The study concludes that the revised coastline should be viewed not merely as an updated geographical statistic but as a strategic asset that supports India's long-term maritime interests and its vision of becoming a leading maritime nation.

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