

# In Britannia's wake

**R**ule Hindustania, Hindustania rule the waves! India is emerging as a world-class naval power and, for the first time, master of its namesake Indian Ocean. Though little-noticed in the West, India's new role of regional naval superpower will have important effects on East Africa and Western Asia.

Fifteen years ago, the Indian navy was little more than a coastal defence force. After the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War, in which sharp naval clashes occurred off Karachi, India decided to invest heavily in building a true blue-water fleet. This policy was in keeping with Indira Gandhi's vision of India as the dominant power in a vast region extending from Iran to Thailand, and south across the Indian Ocean to the tip of Africa.

Today India can boast two small aircraft carriers, 10 submarines, a cruiser and 26 destroyers and frigates supported by a naval air arm of 62 aircraft. Currently on order are the latest Soviet Kilo class attack submarines, fast West German Type 1500 subs and an impressive number of Soviet surface combatants. In terms of numbers, if not experience, India is now about eighth in world ranking as a naval power.

To support its fleet, India has built a number of new naval bases and repair facilities, particularly at the southern end of the continent. India's national program to develop extensive defence industries has also led to the domestic construction or assembly of frigates, patrol vessels and submarines. In spite of local manufacturing, India's navy — and indeed its entire armed forces — is still dangerously dependent on foreign arms and spare parts, particularly those of Soviet origin.

Indian leaders have made no secret of their naval strategy. The first phase, already accomplished, is to be able to bottle up the tiny Pakistani navy in

**ERIC  
MARGOLIS**



time of war. India can also now assure its economic sovereignty out to 200 nautical miles. Smuggling of goods across the Arabian Sea by fast dhows from the Gulf states has been severely reduced.

New naval facilities are being completed in the Andaman and Nicobar Island groups which lie some 800 miles southeast of India. These bases will give India uncontested domination of the Bay of Bengal and three of its littoral states, Bangladesh, Burma and Sri Lanka. The Maldiv Islands are also under strong Indian influence.

Further south, India has shown a keen interest in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Mozambique. Recently, Indian naval units ostentatiously cruised off the Cape of Good Hope, as if to remind the South Africans of Delhi's lengthening arm. There has even been talk of India sending troops and aircraft to South Africa's neighbors. At this fall's Non-Aligned Summit at Harare, Zimbabwe, India emerged as the new champion of the black states of southern Africa. This novel role was no coincidence.

India, clearly enjoying newfound economic and military power, sees no reason why its influence should not be felt along the length of East Africa where there are more than 1.5 million people of Indian origin. Turning East Africa into a major new market for Indian exports is clearly a priority. The historical fact that military and economic power advance hand in hand has certainly not been lost on India's strategists.

Besides flexing its naval muscles, India has also made quite clear its strong objection to the presence of any foreign navies in the Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea. Particular Indian wrath has been reserved for the U.S. and its attempts to turn the tiny atoll of Diego Garcia into a sort of Gibraltar of the Indian Ocean.

Much as India likes to fret about the U.S. Navy, a greater maritime threat is posed by India's own close ally, the USSR. The Soviets already have a constellation of bases scattered about the Indian Ocean from Mozambique to South Yemen. Lately there have been rumors that India has allowed the Soviets to set up a secret naval base in the Andaman Islands.

Moscow, for its own geopolitical reasons, wants to expand its naval power into the Indian Ocean. India, whose armed forces are now dangerously dependent on Soviet weapons and spare parts, cannot afford to alienate its benefactors in Moscow. At the same time, India must find some way of keeping the Soviets out of its own maritime backyard. That is why Delhi has strongly backed a plan to 'demilitarize' the Indian Ocean.

They hope this strategem will keep out the U.S. and USSR — and leave India to rule the waves.

## Punch



"We're one big, happy family here, Jessop, and I have it on good authority that you're a miserable louse."