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104, Janki Niwas, 1st Floor, Dr.Moose Road
Opp. Gadkari Rangayatan, Talavpali,
Thane (West)-400 602, Mumbai, India.
Email- afged2019@gmail.com

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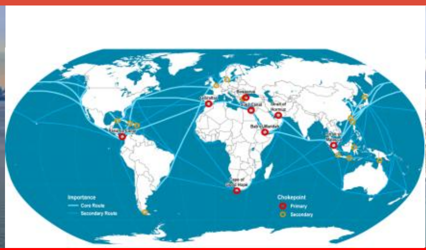


The Quiet Omani Port Reshaping India's Regional Strategy

India's expanding presence along Oman's coastline has unfolded without announcements, declarations, or diplomatic spectacle. Indian naval vessels have been making increasingly regular port calls to Oman, framed as routine deployments and professional exchanges rather than strategic statements.

One such long-range training deployment, acknowledged by India's Ministry of Defence, described Indian Navy ships arriving in Muscat for engagements with the Royal Navy of Oman. The language was deliberately procedural. What matters is not the individual visit, but the accumulation. Naval deployments that once appeared episodic are now predictable, forming a pattern that places Oman firmly within India's western Indian Ocean operating environment.

This rhythm rests on foundations laid earlier. In 2023, India and Oman signed defense cooperation agreements that expanded military engagement and enabled Indian naval vessels to access Omani ports for logistics and maintenance. At the time, these arrangements were treated as enabling frameworks rather than strategic shifts. What has changed since is not access itself, but normalization. What once required explanation now passes without comment.

The geography of Duqm amplifies the significance of this shift. The port lies outside the Strait of Hormuz, beyond the chokepoint politics that routinely inject uncertainty into naval movement inside the Persian Gulf. Periods of regional tension have repeatedly shown how quickly risk around the strait can affect both commercial and military traffic. Access to Omani ports offers India continuity without exposure to the diplomatic volatility, sanctions risk, and legal uncertainty that often accompany sustained activity inside Iranian territory.

This distinction is critical when placed alongside India's other major port project in Chabahar, Iran. Oman's ports cannot replace Chabahar's overland access to Central Asia. Only Iran provides India with a direct land route into Afghanistan and beyond, a reality that continues to shape India's continental strategy. Chabahar remains operational, cargo continues to move, and India has secured a long-term agreement to operate the port. What has changed is not the port's legal or operational status, but the strategic weight India now assigns to it.

For Tehran, the implications are different. The strategic weight Iran once assumed would flow automatically from geography has diminished. India's growing reliance on Duqm represents a second pillar: a politically safer maritime anchor that allows New Delhi to sustain naval operations without exposure to sanctions cycles or diplomatic friction. From Tehran's perspective, this does not replace Chabahar. It reduces the sense of exclusivity that Iran long associated with its position on the map.

For India, the logic is straightforward. Duqm sits outside the Strait of Hormuz, is insulated from sanctions regimes, and does not require political signaling each time it is used. Oman does not employ port access as leverage in regional disputes. A maintenance stop in Duqm carries none of the volatility surrounding long-term commitments in Iran. These attributes make Duqm a low-risk base for India's western Indian Ocean operations.

The shift toward Duqm did not occur overnight, but the rhythm has clearly changed. Naval visits that were once occasional are now regularly scheduled, reflecting a broader recalibration shaped by renewed sanctions enforcement, tighter compliance standards in global financial centers, and India's determination to avoid over-reliance on any single port. Chabahar remains useful, but it no longer stands alone.

Iran has been slower to acknowledge the implications publicly, but the discomfort is visible beneath the surface. Iranian strategic thinking has long rested on the assumption that geography guarantees relevance. That assumption is weaker today. Chabahar still matters, but it no longer translates into leverage. Goods move, infrastructure functions, but India's maritime continuity now rests elsewhere. Geography remains valuable, but political risk increasingly conditions how that value is used.

Even developments that might appear favorable to Iran do little to reverse this trend. Improved working ties between India and the Taliban do not restore Iran's former strategic weight. India may still require Iranian territory for continental access, but its broader maritime posture no longer depends on operating within Iran's political environment.

Yemen : 11 Stranded Vessels with Indian Seafarers Leave Ras Isa

Hodaiedah -- The Directorate General of Shipping has announced that all 11 vessels stranded at Ras Isa Port in Yemen, which collectively carried over 150 Indian seafarers, have successfully departed after discharging their cargo.

The last vessel, MT GAZ GMS, sailed away on June 29, 2025, marking the end of a complex maritime situation that began with an airstrike on April 17, 2025.

This attack not only damaged the port’s infrastructure but also led to a blockade by local authorities, who delayed the sailing permissions until complete cargo discharge was achieved.

The vessels had been immobilized at the port since December 2024, leading to extended periods of uncertainty and discomfort for the crews onboard. The resolution of this crisis is attributed to relentless diplomatic efforts spearheaded by the Indian Embassy in Yemen, with significant backing from Indian missions in London, Riyadh, and Washington D.C. The Directorate General stressed the importance of a collaborative approach involving various government entities, including the Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways, commending their decisive actions and support.

This incident underscores India’s commitment to ensuring the safety, security, and welfare of its seafarers, reinforcing the country’s reputation as a responsible maritime nation dedicated to protecting its workforce globally. The successful evacuation of the stranded vessels not only alleviates a humanitarian concern but also showcases the efficacy of diplomatic and governmental coordination in resolving international maritime challenges.

First cruise vessel of 2025-26 season calls at New Mangalore port

The 2025-26 cruise season at New Mangalore Port has begun. The luxury vessel M S Seven Seas Navigator arrived, carrying international passengers and crew. The port welcomed tourists with cultural displays. Special facilities were arranged for visitors. Tourists explored local attractions, experiencing the region's heritage. The port expects more cruise ship requests for the season.

Mangaluru: The 2025-26 cruise season of the New Manglaore Port has commenced with the arrival of the luxury cruise vessel M S Seven Seas Navigator, officials said on Tuesday.

he Bahamas-flagged cruise ship has arrived at the port at 6.15 am on December 22, and was berthed at Berth No. 4 by 7.15 am, the New Mangalore Port Authority officials said.

The vessel, measuring 172.50 metres in length with a draft of 7.50 metres and a gross registered tonnage of 28,803, arrived from Mormugao Port. It carried 450 international passengers and 360 crew members, a press statement from the port authority said.

NMPA extended a traditional and colourful welcome to the cruise tourists, highlighting the cultural heritage of coastal Karnataka.

Extensive arrangements were made by the port authority in coordination with Customs, Immigration, tourism agencies and other stakeholders to ensure a smooth and pleasant experience for the visitors.

Vinitha Sekhar, Commissioner of Customs, Mangaluru, formally welcomed the ship's master along with senior port officials and employees. (**Source:The Economics Times)**

Happg Lloyds Middle East India Africa Express from 22 Jan 26

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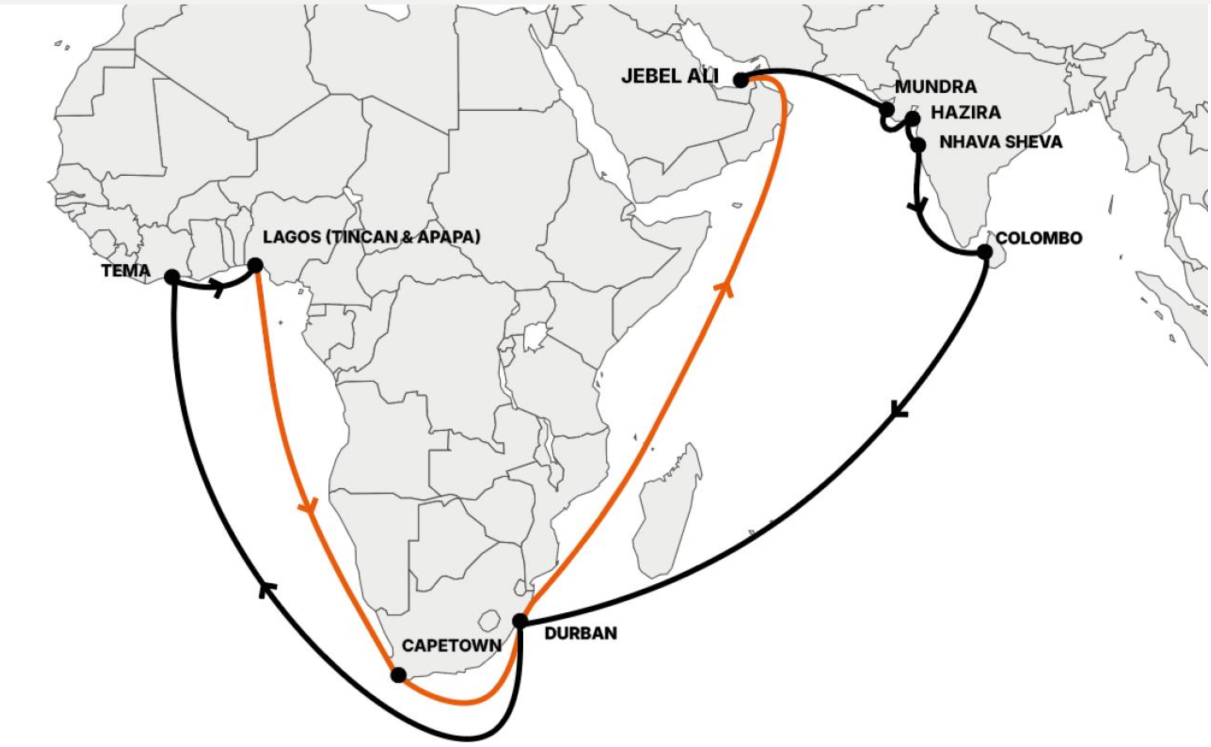

- Happg Lloyds pleased to announce an upcoming upgrade to our **MIAX** service. A new eastbound call at Cape Town will be added starting **January 22, 2026.**
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- This addition will further strengthen connectivity between the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East, and Africa**. Rotation >Jebel Ali – Mundra – Hazira – Nhava Sheva – Colombo – Durban – Tema – Tincan – Apapa – Capetown – Durban - Jebel Ali**

please find below the first vessel voyages calling Wilhelmshaven, including Estimated Time of Arrival (ETA):

India aligns with Hong Kong Convention: New ship recycling rules

According to sector watchers, ship recycling and dismantling is getting increasingly concentrated in South Asia, with countries such as India and Bangladesh taking the lead

The Union government will soon release detailed, stricter norms to regulate recycling of vessels in terms of environmental hazards and worker safety, officials told *Business Standard*.

This will be in line with the Hong Kong Convention (HKC) on the Safe and Sound Recycling of Ships that came into force earlier this year.

The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways has notified several binding provisions of the Recycling of Ships Act 2019 as being enforced starting Wednesday. These broad guiding principles, announced in 2019, were kept in abeyance until the adoption of the HKC. (Business Standard)

V.O. Chidambaranar Port handles longest container vessel

V.O. Chidambaranar Port Authority at Tuticorin achieved a major milestone on December 21, 2025, when M.V. MSC Michaela berthed at its Dakshin Bharat Gateway Terminal, becoming the largest container vessel ever to call at the port. The ship, measuring 304 metres in length overall (LOA) and a beam of 40 metres, carries 6,724 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs), marking the highest container carrying capacity handled at VOC Port to date.

MSC Michaela arrived from the Port of Colón, Panama, and is scheduled to sail next to Colombo, Sri Lanka. During its call, the vessel handled nearly 3,977 TEUs, including imports, exports, restows, and transshipment cargo.

Upgrades such as deepening the maximum draft to 14.20 metres, widening the turning circle, and adding powerful tugs have enabled the port to handle such mega container vessels smoothly and safely.

Indian Port Sector

Adani completes acquisition of Australia's North Queensland Export Terminal

India's Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone (APSEZ) has successfully completed the acquisition of 100 per cent interest in North Queensland Export Terminal (NQXT) in Australia pursuant to completion of all condition precedents, including approvals from "majority of minority" shareholders, Reserve Bank of India, and Foreign Investment Review Board of Australia amongst others.

APSEZ has allotted 14,38,20,153 equity shares of face value INR2 (US$0.02) each to the seller, Carmichael Rail and Port Singapore Holdings on a preferential basis

"NQXT is an excellent asset with distinct geographical advantages, strong growth prospects, and an enviable sustainability track record," said Ashwani Gupta, Whole-time Director and CEO of APSEZ. "NQXT will enhance our presence along the east-west trade corridor along with our other international ports in Israel, Colombo and Tanzania."

NQXT is a natural deep-water, multi-user export terminal with a name plate capacity of 50 million tonnes per annum. APSEZ said the terminal is under a long-term lease from the Queensland Government and is a critical infrastructure asset supporting Australia's significant resource industry.

Located in the Port of Abbot Point in North Queensland, NQXT primarily serves mining customers that are operating in the Bowen and Galilee basins and exports largely to markets in North and Southeast Asia.

NQXT has a long remaining lease file of 85 years, with its lease set to expire in year 2110.

India's Foreign Trade

India has 18 FTAs but must now focus on boosting exports amid tough 2026 trade outlook: GTRI

India's trade focus must shift from signing new deals to maximising existing free trade agreements for export growth, especially in electronics, engineering, and textiles. Facing a challenging global trade environment with rising protectionism and new climate barriers, the nation's export success in 2026 hinges on domestic execution, including quality upgrades and cost reduction, rather than external opportunities.

India has signed more than 18 free trade agreements (FTAs) to date, but the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) has urged the country to pivot from signing new deals to ensuring existing agreements deliver tangible export gains, particularly in electronics, engineering and textiles.

According to the report, India's total exports reached USD 825 billion in FY25 and are projected to rise only marginally to around USD 850 billion in FY26, underscoring a challenging global trade environment. Merchandise exports are expected to remain largely flat due to weak international demand and rising protectionist measures, while services exports could surpass USD 400 billion, providing the main support to India's overall trade performance.

"With 18 FTAs already signed and more possible in 2026, India's priority must shift from signing deals to making FTAs deliver real export gains," the report said.

India Can Cut New Zealand's China Import Dependence

In 2024-25, New Zealand imported goods worth over $10 billion from China compared to just $711 million from New Delhi. Wellington's total imports in that fiscal year were $50 billion,

Indian exporters in various sectors like agriculture, petroleum, pharma, apparel, electronics and auto have potential not only to scale up shipments to New Zealand but also help the island nation reduce its dependence on China.

According to think tank GTRI, in 2024-25, New Zealand imported goods worth over USD 10 billion from China compared to just USD 711 million from New Delhi. Wellington's total imports in that fiscal year were USD 50 billion. GTRI's report stated that opportunities exist for various Indian sectors to increase penetration in the island nation, given a bilateral free trade agreement.

The sectors with potential include processed foods and agri-linked products, petroleum products and industrial chemicals, pharmaceuticals and healthcare, plastics, rubber and consumer goods, textiles and apparel, electronics and electrical equipment, automobiles and transport equipment, aerospace and high-value manufacturing, furniture and lighting.

India is a significant global exporter of bakery products, with exports of USD 602 million worldwide. New Zealand imports around USD 250 million of these goods annually, yet India supplies only USD 6.5 million compared to USD 21 million from China, the report said on Thursday.

The pattern repeats in food preparations also. India exports USD 817 million globally, New Zealand imports USD 455 million, and India's share is just USD 7.7 million.

In oil-cake and animal feed preparations, India's global exports range from USD 382 million to USD 507 million, and New Zealand's imports are USD 340 million to USD 379 million.

"India's exports are negligible, between USD 0.1 million and USD 5 million, even though Chinese competition in these lines is minimal. This suggests an untapped market rather than one blocked by entrenched suppliers," GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava said.

Similarly, India is among the world's largest exporters of refined petroleum products, with global exports of USD 69.2 billion. New Zealand imports around USD 6.1 billion worth of these products each year, but sources only USD 2.3 million from India, while China supplies USD 181 million.

A similar gap, it said, exists in aluminium oxide. India exports more than USD 1.1 billion globally, and New Zealand imports worth USD 255 million. Yet, Indian exports to New Zealand amount to just USD 0.2 million.

In pharma also, India's export strength is clearest in medicines, with global exports at USD 20.6 billion. New Zealand imports nearly USD 962 million worth of medicines, but India supplies only USD 75 million, against China's exports at USD 9.6 million in this category.

In biologicals and vaccines, India exports USD 1.6 billion globally, and New Zealand imports USD 328 million. India exports only USD 5.2 million, another case of significant under-penetration, Srivastava said.

"In women's woven apparel, India's global exports stand at USD 3 billion. New Zealand imports USD 179 million, but India supplies just USD 9.8 million, while China accounts for USD 112 million, despite India's well-established competitiveness in garments," he added.

Further, India's global exports of telecom equipment exceed USD 21.7 billion. The island nation imports USD 1.3 billion, but India supplies only USD 7.6 million, while China exports stand at USD 707 million. "Transformers, batteries, switchgear and cables show similar gaps: Indian global exports of USD 1-3 billion, New Zealand imports of USD 175 million to USD 300 million, and only marginal Indian participation," GTRI said.

India exports USD 6.9 billion of passenger vehicles globally, and New Zealand imports USD 3.1 billion. India supplies just USD 26.6 million compared to USD 261 million from China. In auto parts, India's global exports exceed USD 7.4 billion, but shipments to New Zealand are only USD 2.9 million, against USD 69.5 million from China.

He added that for India, the challenge now is to pair the FTA with targeted export promotion, standards cooperation, regulatory facilitation and logistics support.

Compiled by Dr.Sham Choughule through various sources for private circulation

Director

AFGED
YOUR GATEWAY TO GLOBAL BUSINESS

(International Business, Logistics, and Maritime Transport)

Shamc2001@yahoo.co.in

Association for Global Economic Development-India

Corporate Office: A/111, Mittal Court, Nariman Point, Mumbai - 400 021.

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