

## Mission

Indian Ocean is at the heart of international geo-politics. Some 80% of the world's maritime oil trade flows through three narrow passages of water, known as choke points, in the Indian Ocean. This includes the Strait of Hormuz—located between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman—which provides the only sea passage from the Persian Gulf to the open ocean. Geo-Politically, the Indian Ocean is becoming a pivotal zone of strategic competition. It is also our belief that national security and human security issues as well as ecological and environmental concerns in the Indian Ocean region are linked to the state of individual, social, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, political, economic and collective rights of people in the region. This newsletter is therefore deeply committed to sharing ground realities, experiences, knowledge and global insights on peace, development and conflict resolution issues as well as the state of human rights and justice in the Indian Ocean region.

## Colombo Port City and the Geo-Strategic Shifts in the Indian Ocean

After Hambhantota Port, Sri Lanka has another geo-strategic predicament to offer for other countries in the Indian Ocean in the form of Colombo Port City project. The adoption of this controversial legislation known as “Colombo Port City Economic Commission Bill,” by the Sri Lankan Parliament with a majority of 149 legislators in the 225 members House voting in its favour on 20th May 2021 has sent shock waves to India and the Western world at large.

Colombo Port City (CPC) is a special financial zone under construction next to Colombo, mostly on a land of 2 square kilometers, reclaimed from the sea. This project consists of five million square metres or 269 hectares (including 116 hectares under exclusive control of China). This project is estimated to cost 15 billion US \$, and likely to be completed by 2041. This is the largest private sector development project in Sri Lanka's history and for that matter by foreign company. The process of land reclamation first started in 2014 and completed in 2019. This land was officially declared as part of Sri Lanka in December 2019.

The Colombo Port City Economic Commission has powers that would defy any sovereign authority such as taxes, customs, betting and gambling levies, employee terminations, entertainment taxes, foreign exchange and casino business. Colombo Port City Economic Commission Bill notes that seven member commission to administer the Colombo Port City, which would control everything from taxation to approving new projects and investments, it is the President of Sri Lanka who has the power to appoint these seven members including the foreigners to the Board. Colombo Port City will have its own economic, commercial and criminal laws. Colombo Port City will remain outside

the control of Colombo Municipal Authority with no accountability to the people and the parliament of Sri Lanka. In brief, Colombo Port City will function outside the purview of Colombo Municipal laws and even the national laws of Sri Lanka.

Colombo City Project is likely to be part of the China's “Belt and Road Initiative” – a vast infrastructure related to Maritime Silk Route connecting China with Middle East, Europe and Africa. Colombo Port City is a project with clear Chinese characteristics and expected to serve as part of Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative and China is likely to handle this project as an overseas province for all practical purposes. Hambhantota is located close to the world's busiest east-west shipping route. Given Sri Lanka's existing debt concerns over 18 trillion US\$, a foremost question in our mind is whether Sri Lanka can repay the loan towards the Colombo Port City project or will it also go the Hambhantota way?

Hambhantota and Colombo Port City are key projects, in Chinese view, integral to developing high-quality collaboration in jointly building the Belt and Road and in the process strengthen its maritime strategy. It is critical for China to access and cultivate secure sea routes in the Indian Ocean. We should also keep in mind of the “Malacca Dilemma” and the Chinese search for alternatives. China is the world's highest oil importer – buying 542 million tons of crude oil in 2020. China has increasingly been emphasizing on managing the seas and oceans and protecting maritime rights and interests in the recent period. Security analysts believe that Colombo Port City and Hambhantota constitute, in the long run, as part of the Chinese counter response to Indo-Pacific Security framework consisting of U.S., India, Japan and Australia.

## India Inks Deal with Sri Lanka to Develop Trincomalee Oil Tank Farm

The Hindu, Chennai, January 07, 2022

The move, which finally firms up India's role in the controversial project discussed since the time of the Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987, follows Sri Lankan Cabinet clearance earlier this week

Marking a major milestone in a strategic project in Sri Lanka whose fate has remained uncertain for decades, Lanka IOC, Ceylon Petroleum Corporation and the Government of Sri Lanka signed three lease agreements on jointly developing the Trincomalee oil tank farm in eastern Sri Lanka.

The move, which finally firms up India's role in the controversial project discussed since the time of the Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987, follows Cabinet clearance

(<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/india-inks-deal-with-sri-lanka-to-develop-trincomalee-oil-tank-farm/article38162574.ece>)

earlier this week. Sections have opposed the Rajapaksa government's decision to involve India in a project that was much negotiated by different governments, but was never finalised.

Indian Oil Corporation subsidiary Lanka IOC would run the 14 oil storage tanks it currently operates for 50 years, while CPC would run 24 tanks. Trinco Petroleum Terminal Pvt. Ltd, set up by the CPC for the project, would develop the remaining 61 tanks in the World War II-era facility, in a joint venture where 51% stakes will be held by CPC and 49% by Lanka IOC, Sri Lanka's Energy Minister earlier said.

## Sri Lanka Appeals to China to Ease Debt Burden Amid Economic Crisis

THE GUARDIAN, London, 10 January, 2022

**President urges rescheduling of payments amid food and electricity rationing after pandemic hit tourism sector.**

Sri Lanka has urged China to ease its schedule of debt repayments. Cash-strapped Sri Lanka has sought to reschedule its huge Chinese debt burden in talks with visiting foreign minister Wang Yi, the president's office said.

China is Sri Lanka's biggest bilateral lender and Wang's visit comes after a warning from international ratings agencies that Rajapaksa's government could be on the brink of default.

The island's tourism-dependent economy has been hammered by the pandemic and its depleted foreign exchange reserves have led to food rationing at supermarkets and shortages of essential goods.

Sri Lanka's foreign reserves dropped to just \$1.5bn at the end of November – enough to pay for only about a month's worth of imports.

The island's main energy utility began rationing electricity on Friday after running out of foreign cur-

(<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/10/sri-lanka-appeals-to-china-to-ease-debt-burden-amid-economic-crisis>)

rency to import oil for its thermal generators.

China accounted for about 10% of Sri Lanka's \$35bn foreign debt to April 2021, government data shows. Officials said China's total lending could be much higher when taking into account loans to state-owned enterprises and the central bank.

Sri Lanka has borrowed heavily from China for infrastructure, some of which ended up as white elephants. Unable to repay a \$1.4bn loan for a port construction in southern Sri Lanka, Colombo was forced to lease the facility to a Chinese company for 99 years in 2017.

The United States and India warned that the Hambantota port, located along vital east-west international shipping routes, could give China a military foothold in the Indian Ocean. Both Colombo and Beijing have denied that Sri Lankan ports will be used for any military purposes.

## What is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)?

A 3,000-kilometre corridor from Kashgar in western China to Gwadar in Pakistan on the Arabian Sea. It slices through the Himalayas, disputed territories, plains and deserts to reach the ancient fishing port of Gwadar. Huge Chinese-funded infrastructure projects, including road and railway networks as well as power plants, are being built along the way. Originally

### **Gwadar : Pakistan's key CPEC port**

There are big plans for Pakistan's southern coastal city of Gwadar. Pakistan and China are making a considerable effort – and pledging close to USD 700 million in investment – to transform what was once a

valued at USD 46 billion, the corridor is estimated at USD 62 billion today.

CPEC is part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a massive regional trade and diplomatic venture that covers both land and maritime routes linking China to the rest of Asia and to Europe. CPEC is one of the most ambitious components of the BRI.

sleepy fishing town into a vibrant trade hub, complete with a seaport, airport, major road connections and a trade zone. But the pace of development is slow, and business even slower.

([https://www.thethirdpole.net/en/regional-cooperation/pakistan-gwadar-port-long-way-from-trade-hub-vision/?gclid=Cj0KCQiAoY-PBhCNARIsABcz770p19wwd6leEBRwkc0yAKbKTF\\_LDEud4J54mQ3k8SURLLI6Hhs7Yi0aAk1FEALw\\_wcB](https://www.thethirdpole.net/en/regional-cooperation/pakistan-gwadar-port-long-way-from-trade-hub-vision/?gclid=Cj0KCQiAoY-PBhCNARIsABcz770p19wwd6leEBRwkc0yAKbKTF_LDEud4J54mQ3k8SURLLI6Hhs7Yi0aAk1FEALw_wcB))



## “This is just the beginning”, says Chinese Ambassador to Sri Lanka

News First, Colombo, 17 Dec, 2021

The Chinese Ambassador to Sri Lanka made an open-ended closing remark to News 1st as he concluded his three-day visit this afternoon. When asked about the end of his visit by News 1st, he said that although this was the end of his visit, it was also a beginning. The beginning of what remains unanswered.

‘This is the End, but also the Beginning’, is what the Chinese Ambassador to Sri Lanka said following a historic visit to Adam’s Bridge in the North of Sri Lanka on Friday (17). Ambassador Qi Zhenhong was escorted to Adam’s Bridge by the Sri Lanka Navy and troops by the Sri Lanka Army. Adam’s Bridge, also called Rama’s Bridge, is a chain of shoals, between the islands of Mannar, near northwestern Sri Lanka, and Rameswaram, off the southeastern coast of India.

(<https://www.newsfirst.lk/2021/12/17/this-is-just-the-beginning-says-chinese-ambassador-as-jaffna-visit-ends/>)

The bridge is 30 miles (48 km) long and separates the Gulf of Mannar (southwest) from the Palk Strait (northeast). Ambassador Qi Zhenhong was visiting the Mannar as part of his goodwill tour to the North of the Island. The Ambassador visited the 3rd shoal on Adam’s Bridge which is located some 17 nautical miles off Sri Lanka’s coast.

The Ambassador was escorted close to the 3rd shoal by the Sri Lanka Navy’s Inshore Patrol Craft and he was then transferred to a small battle boat to visit the 3rd shoal, which can be seen from India’s Rameswaram. Notably, the Chinese Ambassador was given special military protection during his three-day visit to the North of Sri Lanka.

## A New Quad in the Western Indian Ocean

Royal United Services Institute - 4 November, 2021

**As geopolitical shifts unfold across the Western Indian Ocean, the coming together of a new grouping of countries with similar interests is likely to facilitate greater engagement with the region.**

Geopolitical realities are never static, and shifts in the balance of power challenge old assumptions. Therefore, countries routinely adjust their strategies and find partners appropriate for responding to the evolving structure of the strategic environment. The ‘new’ Quad seeks to address the changing geopolitics of West Asia as well as the Western Indian Ocean (WIO). The ‘old’ Quad between India, the US, Japan and Australia is focused on managing the rise of China and is naturally oriented towards the Eastern Indian Ocean and Western Pacific. However, in the WIO, until now

there has been no such politico-security arrangement that would bring together countries sharing interests and similar threat perceptions. The ‘new’ Quad seeks to fill this gap. The WIO, the region lying between India, the Suez Canal and South Africa, is strategically critical as it contains the key maritime chokepoints of the Bab-el-Mandeb and the Suez Canal. In 2018, nearly 6.2 million barrels of oil flowed through the Bab-el-Mandeb every day towards Asia and Europe. Sea lanes passing through the region are a critical node in the global energy network as well as economic security dynamics.

(<https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/new-quad-western-indian-ocean>)

## Joint cooperation between Bangladesh, Maldives for security in Indian Ocean

UNB, Dhaka, Dec 24, 2021

Bangladesh and the Maldives have agreed to address and counter the threats posed by organised crimes, piracy, narcotic, and human trafficking, through multi-

lateral and regional for a, including Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), in the quest of attaining security, stability and peace in the Indian Ocean region.

(<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/diplomacy/news/joint-cooperation-between-bangladesh-maldives-security-indian-ocean-2924406>)

## China Widens Presence in Indian Ocean Through Massive Inroads in Djibouti

The Economic Times, New Delhi – 1, October, 2021

China chose Djibouti for setting up a military base in the guise of securing its communication cables in the sea and ships from attacks and piracy. To further its agenda of surveillance and block overseas and deep-sea

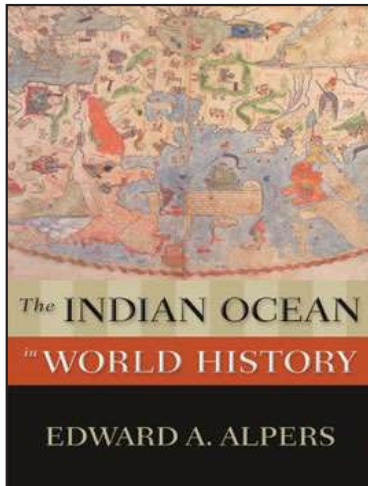
maritime traffic at will, China vigorously participated in the construction of Djibouti’s ports, railways, highways and related infrastructure.

([https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/china-widens-presence-in-indian-ocean-through-massive-inroads-in-djibouti/articleshow/86676234.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/china-widens-presence-in-indian-ocean-through-massive-inroads-in-djibouti/articleshow/86676234.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst))



## BOOK REVIEW

### ‘The Indian Ocean in World History’



Edward A. Alpers. *The Indian Ocean in World History*. New Oxford World History Series. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 172 pp. Illustrations, maps. \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-533787-7; \$44.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-516593-7.

the prose and poetry of ancient, medieval and modern voyagers, historians, and even ship pilots like Ibn Majid. This imagination produces a blend of the romantic and real—a hallmark of human memory in general. The history of ideas and goods, the author convinces readers, happens in one history that can be grasped only by following the dialectical method. The evocative description of the sailing ship as “an essentially male floating society” which facilitated an exchange of goods and ideas comes from this imagination (p. 11). Throughout the book, Alpers displays an awareness of “the enormity of attempting to gain both physical and imaginative control of this vast oceanic world”

The second aspect comprises the centrality of exchange, of goods and ideas together, which has created a unique hybrid cosmopolitan Indian Ocean world, which can be perceived in the evolution of the Indian Ocean societies and their technologies. From shipbuilding technology and its products like the dhow, prahus, and junks to the trade in and migration of grains, fruits, vegetables, exotic animals, and cattle, almost everything is underlined by modes of coastal and oceanic exchange promoted since ancient times by the intrepid inhabitants of the Indian Ocean region. The book is a description of these people and simultaneously an ode to them because their memories are built into the popular interdisciplinary nature of the author’s narrative. However, this does not mean that the dangers posed to the trade of the Indian Ocean region are overlooked by Alpers.

The historical and geographical threat posed to traders, pilgrims, and travelers, like piracy and the vagaries of nature, described in detail in the author’s sources and personal experience have found their way into the text. The Red Sea and Malacca were, and continue to be, notorious maritime sites of piracy. The volume also underscores an important point that goes against understanding the Indian Ocean world from a Eurocentric “Orientalist” perspective despite the rise of European colonialism in the nineteenth century having followed the political decline of Islam.

The history of the Indian Ocean world has been marked by several continuities and changes since time immemorial, but since the days when the water bodies of this geographical area first entered a narrativized human imagination, numerous local traditions, of which the communities living on the Indian Ocean rim are the custodians, have displayed a remarkable resilience documented in this easy-to-read jargon-free volume.

Reviewed by Anirudh Deshpande Published on H-Asia (June, 2015) Commissioned by Sumit Guha (The University of Texas at Austin)

The place of the Indian Ocean in world history is unique because it has been a crossroads for three continents of the Old World and the region of Polynesia and Australia beyond the fluid maritime frontiers of Asia. The Indian Ocean world was “discovered” and made cosmopolitan by the African and Asian societies inhabiting its rim centuries before the Portuguese caravels entered the Arabian Sea only to be guided to the Malabar coast by Arab pilots. The book under review provides a refreshed perspective on the total history of the Indian Ocean region in the current context characterized by the rise of China and India as the new powers set once again to influence this maritime palimpsest.

Edward A. Alpers has written an astonishing volume that distills knowledge accumulated about the Indian Ocean over centuries in about 146 pages rich in information and analysis. Scholars of the Indian Ocean know that Alpers is no stranger to their subject of choice. His vast professional experience, love of the subject, erudition, powers of analyzing large amounts of data and presenting them in succinct generalizations, and ability to transcend time and space within which most history is conceived are demonstrated in this delightful book.

There are two aspects of this book worth noting and that make it exemplary of the historians’ craft fashioned since the ancient times. The first is an imagination of the Indian Ocean brought to the reader through

(<https://networks.h-net.org/node/22055/reviews/73036/deshpande-alpers-indian-ocean-world-history>)

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