BAY OF BENGAL

Nine Billion Dollars of Concrete on One Island
Vs a War Nobody Intends to Fight

> ***The monkey believes it is threatening the leopard.***
> ***The leopard believes it is defending the jungle.***
> ***The carpenter simply sold the saw.***

A WAR NOBODY HAS DECLARED

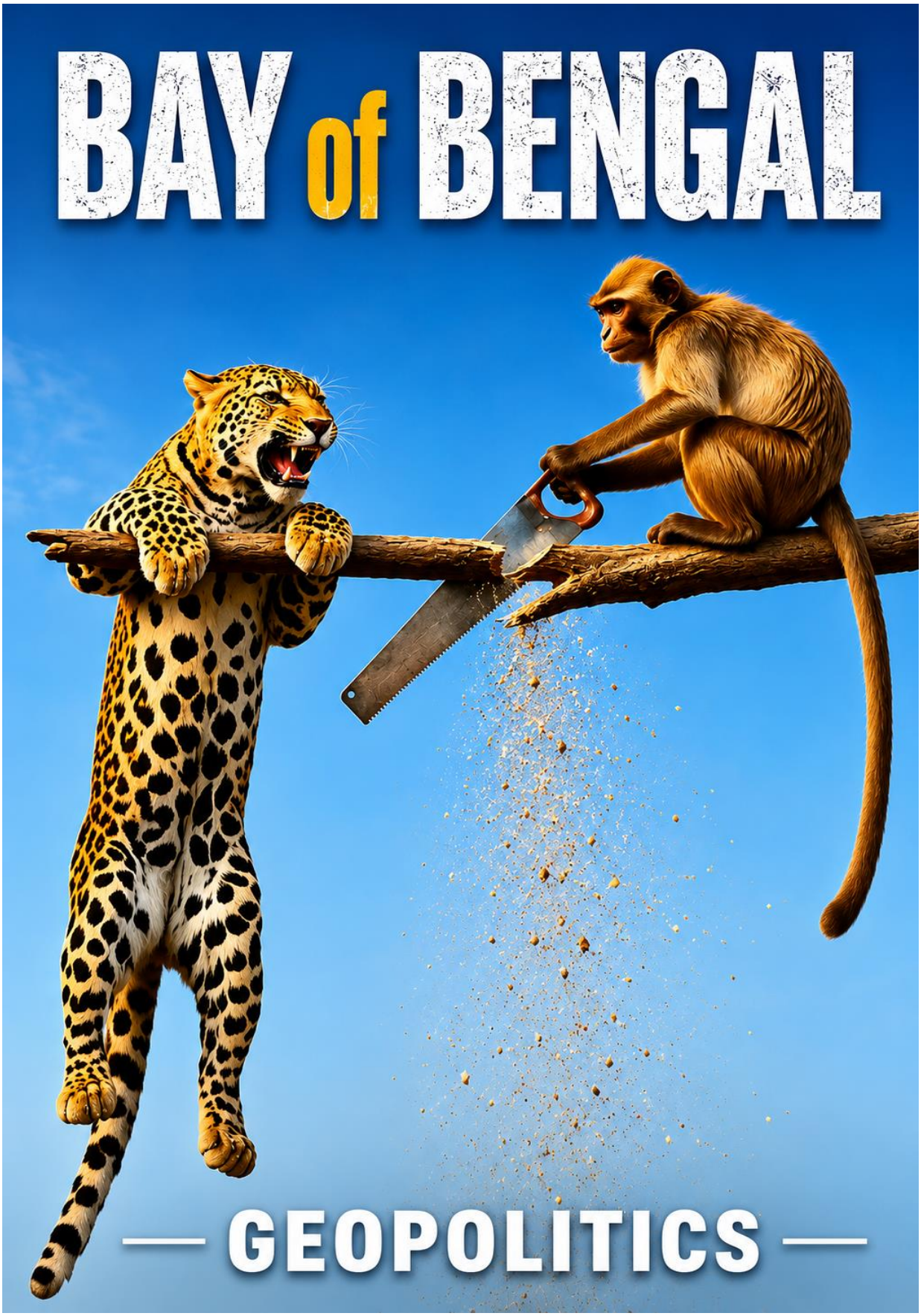
The South China Sea does its geopolitics loudly: water cannon, dredged coral, indignant press conferences at dependable intervals. The Bay of Bengal prefers the passive voice.

No fleets glare at one another across a reef. Nothing is announced that could not also be described as routine.

And yet India is building a port and a dual-use airport **40 nautical miles** from the Malacca shipping lane, Bangladesh has moved to buy **twenty** Chinese fighters, Myanmar has taken delivery of a Chinese submarine, and Sri Lanka continues its slow conversion of debt into strategic real estate.

Not one of these countries faces a plausible risk of invasion by any of the others. Their genuine adversaries are groundwater, blackouts, school-leavers and the price of rice.

> ***Nobody in the Bay is preparing to invade anybody.***
> ***Everybody in the Bay is preparing to pay for the possibility.***


BAY of BENGAL
GEOPOLITICS

INDIA: CONCRETE AS FOREIGN POLICY

The Great Nicobar Island Development Project is presented as infrastructure, and technically it is. **₹81,000 crore** roughly **$9.7 billion**.

A deep-water transshipment terminal at Galathea Bay with an ultimate capacity of 16 million containers, a greenfield airport, a 450 MVA power plant and two new coastal cities, on an island of some 9,000 people.

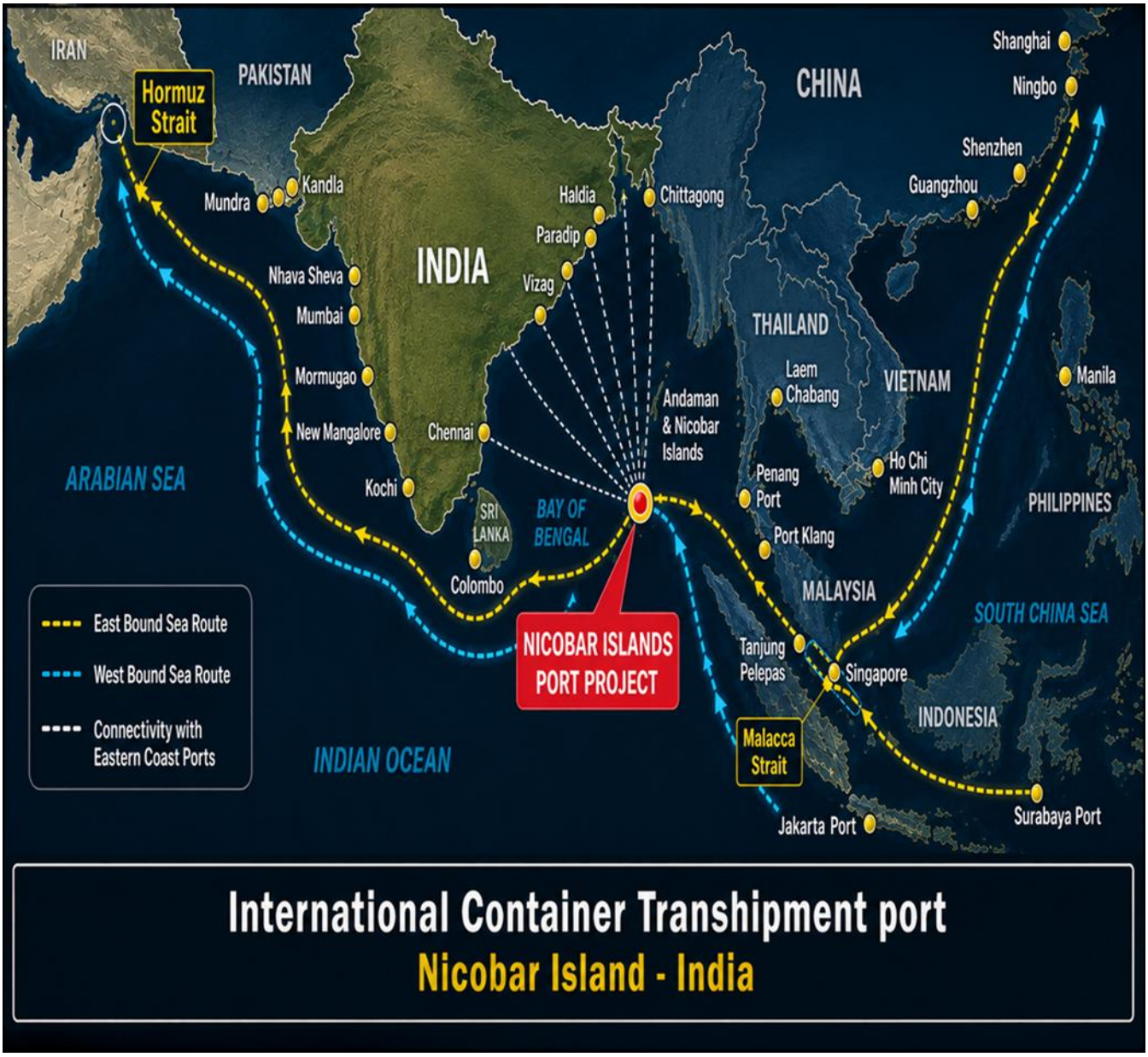
The commercial case is real. India currently watches a large share of its own container traffic transit Colombo, Singapore and Port Klang before reaching customers it could have served itself.

Note in passing that one of the ports New Delhi would rather not depend on is Colombo .The same Colombo whose Chinese connections keep Indian planners awake. Solving two anxieties with one harbour is, at minimum, efficient.

The strategic case is never stated aloud. Nearly every route linking East Asia to Europe, the Gulf and Africa passes within sight of these islands. A permanent presence there does not confer control of global trade. It confers the ability to watch it, escort it, and be impossible to ignore near it.

The airport is described as dual civilian and military, with a peak capacity of **4,000 passengers an hour**.

> ***Four thousand an hour, on an island of nine thousand residents, 40 nautical miles from the busiest strait on earth. Book early. The February weather is glorious and the runway is only incidentally long enough for a maritime patrol aircraft at full fuel load.***



The paperwork is where the project becomes properly instructive. A turtle sanctuary at Galathea Bay was de-notified in **2021** to make room for the port.

Some **130 square kilometres** of forest are being diverted, of which roughly **84** fall inside a tribal reserve now being de-notified in turn. Nearly a million trees.

On the island live around **237 Shompen**, one of the last substantially uncontacted peoples on earth, who have not issued a position paper.

Of the **20,668** coral colonies inside the project area, **16,150** are to be translocated.

> ***The remaining 4,518 have no plan.***
> ***They were not available for comment, and the file does not record whether anyone went looking.***

> ***Geography rarely changes.***
> ***The willingness to spend nine billion dollars on it does.***

THE RING, ITEMISED

BANGLADESH

Twenty J-10CE multirole fighters, a package valued at about $2.2 billion $1.2 billion of airframes and $820 million of training, spares, ground equipment and sustainment, paid down over ten fiscal years to **2035-36**. T

They replace 36 F-7s, which are Chinese-built descendants of the MiG-21. Dhaka has been aiming to sign this month. Measured in raw capability, twenty aircraft do not overturn the regional balance.

Measured as a statement of which capital returns the phone calls, they are eloquent. The official rationale is surveillance and defence of the exclusive economic zone.

> ***Twenty 4.5-generation fighters with AESA radar and PL-15 missiles, to keep an eye on the fishing.***
> ***Beyond visual range, admittedly but then the fish are notoriously evasive.***

Note the ratio.
The weapons are **55%** of the contract. The dependency training, spares, software, technicians is the other **45%**, and it is the half that runs to 2036.

MYANMAR

Its first Chinese-built submarine, a Type 035, delivered in late 2025. The design lineage runs back through Soviet drawings of the 1950s.

Its combat value against India's expanding navy is approximately theoretical, and that was never the point. It announces alignment. It confirms the supplier relationship.

And it obliges New Delhi to allocate anti-submarine attention to a neighbour that previously required none.

> ***A boat old enough to draw a pension, purchased chiefly so that somebody else has to buy sonar.***
> ***As returns on investment go, this is close to perfect.***



Bangladesh J-10Ce
Fighter Jet- China

Myanmar- Conventional submarine
Type O35 - China

SRI LANKA

A different category entirely: its principal strategic asset is not its armed forces but its address. **Chinese investment at Hambantota** and elsewhere has made Beijing one of Colombo's indispensable partners. There is no confirmed Chinese naval base on the island, and there may never be one. Military planners, however, are not paid to be reassured.

> ***Hambantota is a commercial port. It says so quite clearly on the ninety-nine-year lease. Infrastructure has a habit of changing its mind about its purpose. Commercial ports discover military uses with the same reluctance that water discovers downhill.***

THE STRANGE ARSENAL

India fields French Rafales, Russian Su-30s and S-400s, American maritime patrol aircraft, Israeli drones, European helicopters, indigenous missiles and domestically built warships. Strategically this is called diversification, and the instinct is sound: no single supplier can hold New Delhi hostage, because they would all have to agree, and they cannot.

> **Logistically it means spare parts in four alphabets and maintenance manuals in five languages.**
> **Somewhere outside Ambala an officer is holding a French schematic, a Russian bolt and an Israeli invoice, and interoperability is whatever he decides it is before lunch.**

HAMBANTOTA INTERNATIONAL PORT, SRI LANKA

FROM CHINESE-BUILT MEGA PORT TO STRATEGIC INDIAN OCEAN HUB

1. CONSTRUCTION TIMELINE (2007–2015)



Dredging and reclamation works begin



Breakwater and caisson construction



Chinese engineers and construction teams



Quay wall and terminal construction



ZPMC cranes arrive from China and installation begins



Official opening November 2015

2. THEN VS NOW





3. CURRENT INFRASTRUCTURE (2024)



KEY FIGURES

- 16 Berths
- 2,000+ hectares of land
- 2 Million TEU Capacity (Phase II)
- Capable of handling the world's largest vessels
- Integrated industrial and logistics hub

4. STRATEGIC LOCATION



Strategic Importance:

- Near vital sea lanes of the Indian Ocean
- Close proximity to India's southern coast
- Offers logistical advantage for regional transshipment and potential military access

5. SATELLITE VIEW (2025)



Hambantota Port stands as a flagship of the Belt and Road Initiative, enhancing China's maritime presence in the Indian Ocean while serving as a commercial and logistics hub for regional connectivity.

The neighbours have taken the opposite route and increasingly buy from one address. From Beijing's side of the table the elegance is obvious. Every exported airframe creates technical dependence. Every hull generates decades of maintenance. Every missile eventually needs an upgrade only the original vendor can supply.

THE SUBSCRIPTION MODEL

Defence procurement has never been merely about defence. Every significant contract germinates an ecosystem: training, maintenance, software, replacement parts, joint exercises, officer exchanges, technical advisers, industrial offsets, political access.

An entire generation of officers grows up professionally fluent in one supplier's systems and habits. Dependence stops being transactional and becomes institutional — which is a polite way of saying it stops being a decision. An aircraft bought this year may still require foreign support in 2055.

> ***Arms exports are the only subscription service in which cancelling your plan constitutes a foreign policy crisis.***

None of this requires corruption to explain. Ordinary commercial incentives do the work unassisted; where corruption exists it merely shortens the timeline of a relationship strategic logic was already arranging. The aircraft becomes obsolete. The relationship does not.

PRESTIGE, AND ITS GOING RATE

There remains the question of what is actually being purchased. Part of the answer is prestige, historically among the most expensive commodities ever traded. No government has been carried into a second term on the strength of a well-run grain warehouse.

Fighter aircraft make magnificent television. Submarines photograph beautifully. Destroyers look superb on national day, framed against a sunset and a brass band.

> ***No camera crew has ever been moved to tears by an efficient tax authority.***

Military symbolism carries a domestic political value independent of military necessity. Asia is certainly not alone in applying it.

THE MONKEY, THE LEOPARD AND THE CARPENTER

China may have no need of confrontation to complicate India's calculations. Every fighter exported into India's neighbourhood obliges New Delhi to modernise further. Every submarine delivered summons another anti-submarine programme. Every radar sold invites a radar to counter it, which invites a jammer, which invites a better radar.

> ***The genius of the model has nothing to do with winning wars. It lies in ensuring somebody else pays, indefinitely, to prepare for one. An arms race remains one of the very few industries in which anxiety is not a side effect but the raw material.***

CONCLUSION:
FEEDING PEOPLE OR FEEDING FEAR

Perhaps the Bay of Bengal really does stand at the opening of a dangerous confrontation. History would be the last thing to rule it out, and responsible governments cannot be blamed for buying insurance.

But the gravest threats facing South Asia remain stubbornly, unglamorously civilian: food security, fresh water, urban congestion, youth unemployment, energy, education, climate resilience.

No surface-to-air missile has ever intercepted a failing harvest. No squadron, however immaculate its fly-past, has lowered an aquifer's salinity or found work for twenty million school-leavers.

This is not an argument against armed forces. Nations unable to defend themselves eventually lose the right to decide anything at all.

But no country has ever grown prosperous by accumulating impressive equipment. Security creates the conditions for prosperity. It is not prosperity, and nobody who had to live on it has ever confused the two.

> ***Two competitions are running in the Bay at once.***
> ***The first wins the headlines.***
> ***The second decides the century.***
> ***Meanwhile, the carpenter*** **never leaves the treeline. He simply** ***sells saws and business has rarely been better.***

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