THE BIG PICTURE : MARITIME SECURITY CHALLENGES

CONTEXT:

- Defence Minister Rajnath attended the 14th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus where he flagged India's concerns on Maritime Security.
- General Bipin Rawat, the Chief of Defence Staff, had announced in April that the **country will establish an apex federal body designated the National Maritime Commission (NMC) by mid-2021**, to oversee maritime affairs

HIGHLIGHTS:

- **ADMM PLUS Meet**:
  - Defence Minister **called for rule based order in Indo-Pacific and raised the issue of freedom of navigation in South China Sea.**
  - He underlined the **key role of ASEAN-centric forum in promoting dialogue and engagement towards a pluralistic, cooperative security order in Asia**.
  - He recalled the **launch of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative** (IPOI) and stated that IPOI is an open global initiative which draws on existing regional cooperation architecture and mechanism. He noted the commonality between India's IPOI and ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific.
  - **What is ADMM PLUS:**
    - It is an **annual meeting of Defence Ministers of 10 ASEAN Countries and eight partner countries.**
    - This year marks the 10th year of inception of ADMM Plus forum.
    - Eight Dialogue Partners are Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Russia and the USA (collectively referred to as the "Plus Countries").
    - It aims to promote mutual trust and confidence between defence establishments through greater dialogue and transparency.
    - Agreed **five areas of practical cooperation under this mechanism are**: Maritime security, counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, peacekeeping operations and military medicine.
- **National Maritime Commission:**
  - A **National Maritime Security Coordinator** would head the proposed body.
  - The necessity for such an apex body was first highlighted in the 2001 Kargil Group of Ministers Report and thereafter in the wake of the 26/11 Mumbai attacks of 2008.

INDIA'S MARITIME INTERESTS:

- **Maritime Territory**
  - India has a **huge coastline of about 7517 km and more than 1200 islands**. Many of these islands are quite distant with the farthest of the A&N islands about 1600 km from the nearest mainland.
  - India's territorial sea has an expanse of 193,834 sqkm while the **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) covers 2.02 million sqkm.**
  - The **living and non-living resources in this zone, which measure about two-third of the landmass of the country**, are exclusive to India, as also the trade and transport facilities that navigate through this area.
  - This expanse is also **home to 51 percent of India's proven oil reserves and 66 percent of natural gas reserves.**

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- **Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs)**
  - The importance of the Sea Lines can be gauged from the fact that the oceans supported about **four fifths of the total world merchandise trade**.
  - Over the last decade, India's seaborne trade has grown at twice the global growth rate of 3.3 percent while cargo traffic at Indian ports has doubled to 1 billion tonnes per annum over the last decade and is expected to reach 1.7 billion tonnes per annum by 2022.
  - This **amounts to a total of 95 percent of India's trade volume**.
- **Maritime Economy**
  - The Indian economy is hugely dependent on energy imports to the **extent of 81 percent of the total domestic oil consumption in 2015-16.**
  - Nearly **95 percent of India's international trade by volume and over 70 percent by value is carried over the seas.**
  - India is also the world's **fourth largest producer of fish**, most of which comes from the sea.
  - This maritime economy is supported by an **extensive network of 13 major and about 200 minor ports all along the coast.**
- **Maritime Investments**
  - India has invested in a variety of sectors like infrastructure, industry, energy, and services in a number of counties in the immediate maritime neighbourhood and beyond.
  - India has made significant strides towards harnessing deep sea resources with the **International Seabed Authority according it pioneer status and an allocation of 75000 sqkm of seabed in the Central Indian Ocean**.
- **Indian Diaspora**
  - From time immemorial, India has had trade and cultural links with a number of countries in the IOR.
  - The Gulf and Middle East region alone has in excess of **8 million NRIs employed in various sectors of these countries. Remittances from this Diaspora exceeded $ 100 billion** in 2014.
  - Considering that **many of these countries are coastal states**, the safety and security of the Indian Diaspora residing there assumes importance in the maritime security framework.
- **India's Historic Cultural and Trade Links in the IOR**
  - India's location in the Indian Ocean has placed it at the nerve centre of trade and cultural cross-pollination in this region throughout history.
  - Historical evidence exists of Indian linkages with Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia and Mauritius with manifestations of Indian culture clearly seen in their temples and legends.
  - Nurturing of these linkages is important for preservation of India's interests in the region.
  - The Ministry of Culture launched **Project Mausam** in June 2014 to re-connect and re-establish communications between countries of the Indian Ocean world.
  - Focused efforts to further projects such as this and others like the Kerala government's **'Spice Route'** will strengthen India's maritime interests in the IOR.

INDIA'S MARITIME SECURITY CONCERNS:

- **Recent issues:**
  - **COVID-19** has highlighted the fragility of the global logistic supply chain, and India too has been affected. India's exports have been hit by the pandemic-induced scarcity of shipping containers, so much so that the country has now decided to make its own containers.
  - The **recent Suez thrombosis** caused by the grounding of MV Ever Given in the Suez Canal has lessons for our economy and energy security.
- **Control of Choke Points**

- Access to the Indian Ocean is geographically controlled by a number of choke points leading to and from the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, and from the Southern Indian Ocean, which are critical for safeguarding the Indian maritime interests.
  - Examples: **Straits of Hormuz, Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb, Gulf of Aden, Malacca Strait**.
- **Regional Instability**
  - The Indian Ocean littoral has been **witness to large areas of political instability** in the recent past. Examples: Yemen, Indonesia, Somalia, Iran-Iraq, Sri Lanka and Myanmar
  - Indian maritime security forces then had to conduct dedicated operations to combat this menace, like the Indian intervention in the Maldives in 1988 to foil a coup d'état.
- **Piracy**
  - India has not only escorted numerous merchant ships of all countries but concerted efforts of its maritime security forces has ensured that this piracy has been controlled
  - Statistics have shown an **increase in piracy, off the coast of Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Indonesia.**
- **Trafficking**
  - The Indian Ocean Region is regrettably home to the world's most notorious areas of **drug production, the Golden Crescent and the Golden Triangle.**
  - The trans-national networks established by the drug smugglers also serve as conduits for other destabilising activities like **gunrunning and human trafficking.**
- **Maritime Terrorism**
  - India's huge coastline, a thriving maritime commercial community along its coast with nearly **200,000 fishing boats and a fishermen population of 4 million** make the job of monitoring maritime activity an unenviable task.
  - The ability of adversarial interests to exploit this vast maritime activity for launching attacks on land is therefore quite high, as was witnessed in the **26/11 terrorist acts.**
- **Extra Regional Military Presence**
  - It is intended to **further strategic interests of various nations**.
  - The ongoing international naval effort has also benefited nations in terms of **operational intelligence gained and an expanded military maritime footprint.**
- **Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing**
  - A World Wildlife Fund report on illegal fishing has found that **87 percent of the fish stocks surveyed in the Western and Eastern Indian Ocean were experiencing high levels of IUU fishing.**
- **Maritime Territory:** India's coasts are characterised by a **diverse range of topography such as creeks, small bays, back waters, rivulets, lagoons, swamps, beaches, small islands (inhabited as well as uninhabited) etc.**
- **Maritime security management:**
  - The challenge of maritime security management today is the **multiplicity of maritime stakeholders,** who often work at cross-purposes.
  - Narrow organisational loyalties, turf wars and reluctance to share information characterise most of them.
  - **Decision makers of the civilian generalist bureaucracy lack maritime domain knowledge** and may never have stepped on to a ship, let alone have spent a day in heavy seas.
  - Most of their **solutions therefore often tend to adapt a land-centric approach** and are often too little and too late.
  - Further, the country has nine coastal states and four Union territories, most of whom believe that maritime and coastal security is the Centre's responsibility.
  - In fact, some **states are yet to set up 'maritime boards'**, despite the Centre's advice to do so.
  - Absence of physical barriers on the coast and presence of vital industrial and defence installations on it enhances the vulnerability of the coasts to illegal cross border activities.
  - **Shortage of manpower, Inadequate training for marine police, Lack of a cooperative mechanism between different agencies, below par state-level monitoring mechanisms**.

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- **'Non-traditional' security challenges:**
  - Such as **climate change, haphazard urbanisation of coastal regions, natural disasters and pandemics.**
  - Weak oceanic governance has meant high degree of pollution, depletion of fishing stocks and damage to environment.
  - Other challenges include **technology capacity build up** to leverage on the resource base of Indian Ocean
  - Oceans have become **dumping grounds for waste and issues like oil spills** etc.
- **Geopolitical shifts:**
  - These geopolitical shifts have led to great power contestation at sea, generating various maritime flashpoints in different waters, naval rivalries and build-up and more aggressive naval war fighting doctrines.
  - There are rising tensions between China and Japan, China and US, China and ASEAN in South China Sea, tensions in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea and the northern Atlantic.
  - The aggravating factor is the growing tension between Russia and US affecting different seas.
  - The pattern of naval modernisation includes capabilities for asymmetric warfare, amphibious warfare, pressure on chokepoints and second submarine-based nuclear strike capability.
- **Infiltration, Illegal Migration and the Refugee Influx:** India's land boundaries have always been porous to infiltration by terrorists/militants and large scale illegal migration. Example: **creek areas of Gujarat have been highly vulnerable.**

REGIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE:

India has always espoused a cooperative approach and participation of all states in promoting maritime security as enunciated by PM Narendra Modi in his vision of SAGAR – Security And Growth for All in the Region.

- **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA):** launched in 1997 for promoting intra-regional economic cooperation and development.
- **Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS):** is a voluntary initiative formed in 2008 that seeks to increase maritime co-operation among navies of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region.
- **Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP):** is a regional government-to-government agreement, brought into force in September 2006 to promote and enhance cooperation against piracy and armed robbery in Asia.
- **ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF):** objectives are to foster dialogue and consultation on political and security issues of common interest and make efforts towards confidence-building and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region.
- At the multilateral level, India has played a key role in shaping BIMSTEC and Mekong-Ganga Cooperation.
- In south-east Asia, it has played an important and supportive role in **ADMM Plus and Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum and East Asia Summit** as regards maritime security issues there.
- In the western Pacific, it participates in **US-led Western Pacific Naval Symposium**. It is also an Observer at the **Arctic Council**.

INDIAN MARITIME AGENCIES:

- **Indian Navy:** aims to be the 'net security provider' in the maritime neighbourhood, including deployments for anti-piracy, maritime security, Non-combatant Evacuation Operations and HADR (Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief) operations.
- **Coast Guard**: protects India's EEZ from criminals, pirates, smugglers, poachers, human-traffickers and foreign subversion. It also carries out rescue missions in India's search and rescue zone. It is also engaged in developing bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

- **Coastal police**: confining its activities to largely coastal waters up to 24 nautical miles, with the help of other agencies, it has a surveillance network comprising coastal villagers, CISF personnel and data from radar chain and sensors installed on sailing vessels.
- **Maritime shipping and shipbuilding**: A major task for the government is to enhance its capacity for Indian commercial shipping as well as infrastructure.
- **Ocean affairs**: Ministry of Earth sciences (2006) is responsible for development of technology for exploitation and exploration of marine resources, weather services, climate change and geo-hazards, including tsunamis and vulnerability mapping for the purpose.
- **Customs Marine Organisation:** created following the recommendations of the Nag Chaudhari Committee.
- **Multi-layered Surveillance System:** Under the system, the outer layer (beyond 200 nautical) was patrolled by the Indian naval ships and aircraft; the intermediate layers (12-200 nautical miles) was patrolled by Indian Coast Guard; and the inner layer i.e. the territorial waters (shoreline to 12 nautical miles), was patrolled by the marine police.
- **National Committee for Strengthening Maritime and Coastal Security:** coordinates all matters related to Maritime and Coastal Security and periodically reviews coastal security against threats from the sea with all stakeholders.
- **Coastal Surveillance Network:**
  - comprising of static sensors along coasts, **automatic identification systems** (AIS), long range tracking, day-night cameras and communication devices has been put in place.
  - **Vessel Traffic Management System** (VTMS) radars are installed on all major & minor ports to facilitate surveillance.
  - Commissioning of **Information Management & Analysis Centre** (IMAC) in Gurugram for easy collection and dissemination of shipping data for increased awareness.
  - The Navy established **the Information Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region** (IFC-IOR) at IMAC for 24/7 regional information sharing on commercial shipping.
  - **Central Industrial Security Force** (CISF) now guards ports. Moreover, **Sagar Prahari Bal** was constituted as a special force from navy for protection of naval bases.

OTHER INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT:

- To leverage the potential of being present on the oceanic trade route, Indian Government has called for the blue economy development, modernization of its ports, **Sagarmala programme**, Industrial parks and logistic parks. This will provide the port led development in the Indian coastal states thus fuel the Indian economy.
- **Operation Sagar Kavach** was put in operation post 26/11 to improve coordination between security agencies including Indian Navy, Coast Guard and the local police.
- **Indian Maritime Security Strategy (IMSS) 2015** of Indian Navy: envisages greater coordination between different maritime agencies; securing SLOCs; Maritime Security Operations for contemporary assessments of maritime terrorism, piracy etc.; multilateral maritime engagement, local capacity building, technical cooperation etc.
- **Coastal Security Scheme** to strengthen security infrastructure of Marine Police Force in coastal states/UTs.
- Enhance Maritime Domain Awareness through **National Command Control Communication and Intelligence Network (NC3I),** an over-arching coastal security network which collates and disseminates data about all ships, dhows, fishing boats and all other vessels operating near our coast.

WAY FORWARD:

- **State police agencies may be integrated** leveraging their unique access to fishermen and local communities, facilitating the flow of vital human intelligence.
- **Comprehensive legislations** must be enacted to place systems and processes for the protection of India's maritime infrastructure.

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- The government must promulgate a **National Commercial Maritime Security Policy Document**, to articulate its strategic vision for maritime security.
- Given India's geostrategic location, it could sherpa a cluster of Indo-Pacific nations into a **"sagar panchayat"** and uphold the rule of law at sea.
- Given India's stakes in Indian ocean, it is very significant for India to **develop blue-water naval capabilities.**
- India should **develop sea-denial capability** mainly at choke points in Indian ocean such as Strait of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb, Strait of Malacca.

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