

Answer:

India has an approximately 7,516 km long coastline which is managed by the Union Government and 9 coastal states. The security of coastal areas and seas is eminent because of economic and strategic interests. About 90% of India's foreign trade by volume and nearly 70% by value of external trade is conducted through the seas, important urban centres, and industries along with scientific research centres, nuclear power stations, defence installations, energy infrastructure, etc. are located across India's coastal boundaries.

Following are the security threats and challenges that originate from the seas:

- **Threat of terrorism:** The Mumbai serial blasts in 1993 and terrorist attacks of 26/11 in Mumbai happened due to the infiltration of terrorists and explosives through the sea. Due to the remoteness and vastness of the coastline, it often remains unguarded and provides ideal spots for infiltration.
- **Challenge of smuggling:** The creeks along the coasts of Gujarat and West Bengal's Sundarbans are the most preferred routes for smuggling. Boats can easily land and disappear in stealth, and avoid detection by taking advantage of the topography. India's coasts have been vulnerable to the smuggling of goods, gold, narcotics, explosives, arms, and ammunition. The physical proximity of India's coasts to Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Gulf countries adds to its vulnerability.
- **Human trafficking and infiltration:** The dense mangroves provide refuge to infiltrators during low tide and numerous islands and sandbars which are present along the entire coastline provide the ideal hideaways for infiltrators and their contraband. Thus eastern India has been increasingly witnessing a steady increase in illegal migration from Bangladesh.
- **Threat of piracy and armed robbery:** The threat of piracy to international trade and the safety of the sea lanes of communication has emerged as a major problem, especially on India's western sea border.
- **Aggression by other states in the ocean surrounding India:** China's evolving military profile in the immediate and extended neighbourhood and its opposition to freedom of navigation and rule-based order has raised tensions along India's sea boundary.

To counter the above threats, the following are some recent initiatives taken by India to strengthen coastal security:

- **Use of its United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Presidency:** As the President of UNSC, India organized a UN Security Council High-Level Open Debate on "Enhancing Maritime Security: A Case For International Cooperation" which was chaired by the Indian Prime Minister. The objective of the debate was to highlight effective international maritime cooperation to respond holistically to natural and manmade threats to maritime security.
- **India introduced Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), policy:** It is India's policy for cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The policy is based on five pillars and calls for cooperation, coordination, and collective action for advancing peace and security in the region, by resident states of the IOR.
- **Coastal Security Scheme (CSS):** The Department of Border Management under the Ministry of Home Affairs introduced the CSS in a phased manner with the objective of strengthening the infrastructure of the Coastal Police Force for patrolling and surveillance of coastal areas.
- **Various exercises by Navy and Coast Guard:** Various exercises at different levels, such as Exercise Sea Vigil, Singapore India Maritime Bilateral Exercise (SIMBEX), etc. are undertaken regularly by the Navy and the Coastguard to build cooperation and an environment of security in the region.

There exists a multi-tier arrangement for protection and maritime security of India involving the Indian Navy, Coast Guard, and Marine Police of coastal States and Union Territories. The need of the hour is strengthening national and international cooperation, coordination, and undertaking capacity-building measures so as to ensure that our coasts are better monitored, infiltrators are caught and piracy and smuggling happening through coastlines are effectively checked.