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India's Indo-Pacific strategy

Significance for Prelims: Not Much

Significance for Mains: Indo-Pacific strategy; and how it will help India's Eastern and North Eastern states.

News: India is going through a new Indo-Pacific policy and strategy phase. But, the interpretation of the 'Indo-Pacific' policy by the national capital may differ from the perceptions of this policy in Northeastern and eastern India. Key takeaways from various policy conclaves show that Indo-Pacific can deliver better results if stakeholders' perspectives at the ground level are absorbed in the Indo-Pacific policy.

Fundamental issues associated with Northeastern and eastern India:

- To ensure adequate security,
- Speed up economic development,
- Connect better with the rest of India and select South Asian and Southeast Asian nations.

Improvements in East due to Indo-Pacific Policy: Northeast comprises seven 'sisters' or States and one 'brother', Sikkim.

- Better security conditions and development led to the transformation of Sikkim.
- Policy conversations in Manipur helped in clarifying local needs and priorities.
- Kolkata views the Indo-Pacific from the lens of culture.
- Improvement in security conditions of Manipur

Issues associated with East and North East India:

- North-Eastern regions face smuggling, drug trafficking, transnational border crime and insurgent activity from border areas.
- Serious non-traditional threats are the influx of refugees from Myanmar.

- China is a 'constant player' in the disturbance of the North-Eastern region. So necessitated vigilance and strict action by security agencies like Assam Rifles.
- Insensitive handling of lawful exchanges with neighbouring countries.

Way forward: Concentrate on Economic Development

- Address core issues behind the insurgency substantially and accelerate development.
- Improvement in roads connecting northeastern towns and cities.
- Creation of jobs for graduates produced by local universities.
- Promotion of Manipur as a medical tourism hub for other Indian States, Myanmar, and Bangladesh.
- Expansion of research and development facilities to leverage the region's biodiversity.
- Indian corporates and foreign investors should increase investment for better management of accelerated development.
- Effective and people-sensitive border management.

Conclusion: India is now in the Indo-Pacific policy and strategy phase after the 'Look East' and 'Act East' policies. Countries should expand people-related cooperation for broader acceptance of the Indo-Pacific and consolidation of the Quad.

Views of Scholars on Indo-Pacific:

- **Md. Shahidul Haque (former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh)** says neighbours should focus on "the geo-cultural dimension" of the Indo-Pacific, moving beyond geopolitics and geo-economics.
- **Melinda Pavek (U.S. Consul General)** projected the U.S. as "a proud Indo-Pacific nation,". To face future challenges, Indo-Pacific countries should fortify historical and geographic ties.

Future trends are emerging in Indo-Pacific:

- The growing significance of the Bay of Bengal region.
- The increasing importance of the Concept of the Indo-Pacific when it goes beyond the outer circle of the Bay of Bengal and its littorals.
- To enhance the effectiveness of the Indo-Pacific, member-states need to invest more in the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).
- India should hear the voices of Northeast and eastern India's proper implementation of the Indo-Pacific strategy.
- India should go beyond 'Look East' and 'Act East' to 'Think and Relate East'.

Further readings:

1. India's Act East and Look East policy.

Mains(2020):

1. What is the significance of Indo-US defence deals over Indo-Russian defence deals?
Discuss with reference to stability in the Indo-Pacific region

Source: The Hindu

Article: Connecting India's East with the Indo-Pacific.

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