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EU & Indo-Pacific

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Why in News

Recently, the **European Union (EU)** approved conclusions on a **European Union strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific**.

- The renewed EU commitment to the Indo-Pacific will have a **long-term focus** and will be **based on upholding democracy, human rights, the rule of law and respect for international law**.
- Indo-Pacific is a **region spanning from the east coast of Africa to the Pacific island states**.



Key Points

- **Need:**
 - Intense geopolitical competition adding to increasing tensions on trade and supply chains as well as in technological, political and security areas.
 - Human rights are also being challenged. These developments increasingly threaten the stability and security of the region and beyond, directly impacting on the EU's interests.
- **Aim:**
 - To contribute to regional stability, security, prosperity and sustainable development at a time of rising challenges and tensions in the region.
 - Promoting rules-based multilateralism, giving centrality to ASEAN (Association of SouthEast Asian Nations), a point also stressed by India.
- **Main Features of the Strategy:**
 - **Covid-19:**
The EU will work together in order to mitigate the economic and human effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and work towards ensuring an inclusive and sustainable socio-economic recovery.
 - **Free and Fair Trade:**
 - The EU's approach and engagement will look to foster a “rules-based international order, a level playing field, as well as an open and fair environment for trade and investment, reciprocity, the strengthening of resilience, tackling climate change and supporting connectivity with the EU.
 - On trade partnerships, the EU will aim to conclude free trade agreements with Australia, Indonesia and New Zealand and take further steps towards the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment with China.
 - It will also continue to explore deepening economic relations with India.
 - **Security and Defence:**
 - It will continue to develop partnerships in the areas of security and defence, including to address maritime security, malicious cyber activities, disinformation, emerging technologies, terrorism, and organised crime.
 - It has taken the decision to extend the geographic scope of its CRIMARIO (Critical Maritime Routes) II activities from the Indian Ocean into South and Southeast Asia with a view to contribute to safer sea lanes of communication with the EU.

CRIMARIO:

The EU Critical Maritime Route Wider Indian Ocean (CRIMARIO) project was launched in 2015 to improve maritime security and safety in the Wider Indian Ocean, with a particular focus on selected countries and archipelagos in East Africa, it aims to support countries in the region to enhance their Maritime Situational Awareness (MSA).

- **Role for India:**

- Increasing competition, power rivalry, unilateral actions challenging the multilateral order and international laws are some of the **common concerns shared by India and Europe.**
- With an **enhanced focus on their strategic relations and engagement with other like-minded regional players**, India and EU can play a significant role in preserving an open, free, inclusive and rules based order in the Indo-pacific.
- India's recent engagement with European powers in Indo-Pacific:
 - India's **support for France's membership of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)**.
 - India's backing for a larger European role in the Indo-Pacific. **India has welcomed the interest of Germany and Netherlands** in building a new geopolitical architecture in the Indo-Pacific.
- Some of the **crucial areas that India and EU can work together include** joint efforts in capacity building against challenges like piracy, counter-terrorism etc and cooperation in enhancing interoperability and domain awareness, maritime technologies, **blue economy** etc.

Way Forward

- There is a **growing realisation of the need for a larger European role in the region**, as the European strategic community has begun to acknowledge that strategic and economic interests of Europe are intrinsically linked to the Indo-Pacific region.
- Increasing convergence of interests and shared values offer scope for **deepening India-EU cooperation in the region** to secure global commons, maintain stability and support economic prosperity in a cooperative manner and together shape a stable multipolar order.

Source: TH