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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. Examine the vulnerabilities and preparedness of India with respect to coastal security. (250 words)

08 Apr, 2019 GS Paper 3 Internal Security

Approach

- Briefly introduce the broader coastal challenge faced by India.
- Describe the security structures and initiatives by government to deal with these challenges.
- Give conclusion.

Introduction:

- India has a 7,517 km-long coastline of which 5,423 km covers the mainland and 2,094 km encircles Andaman & Nicobar Islands.
- This long and porous coastline along with adversarial neighborhood provides multiple challenges for Indian coastal security apparatus.

Coastal Vulnerabilities

- **Non- state actors**
 - The highest vulnerability is penetration by non-state actors and terror attacks on cities along the coast, vital installations like atomic power plants, oil platforms, naval/ military/coast guard bases and industrial areas.
 - Attacks on these areas would not only be financially disastrous for the nation but due to the associated/collateral damage, they could create a fear psychosis amongst the people.
- **Organized Crimes and piracy along the coastal line**
 - Threats posed by organized gangs carrying out smuggling of narcotics, arms and explosives.
 - These criminal groups and gangs, operating for profit, would also cause serious domestic security concerns by their networking with terrorists and providing logistical support for terror operations ashore.
- **Illegal migrants**
 - The third threat level would include consequential and indirect threats; its ambit would cover the vulnerability of the Indian coast from illegal inflow of migrants and refugees from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, especially along the Odisha and Tamil Nadu coasts.
 - Though such people do not pose a direct security threat, the probability of terror operatives sneaking into the country in the guise of refugees cannot be ruled out.
- **Infrastructure and Resources for Coastal Security:** There is constraint on the availability of resources (both technological and in terms of manpower). It is difficult to guard the entire coastline in a fool-proof manner.

- **Disputed Maritime Boundary:** Disputed Maritime Boundary not only poses serious security challenges but also hinder offshore development. India's maritime boundaries with Pakistan and Bangladesh are not delineated because of overlapping claims.
- **Coordination problems:**
 - An estimated 22 different ministries and departments are involved in securing India's coasts. At the central level alone, these include the Ministries of Home Affairs, Defence, External Affairs, Shipping, Forest and Environment, Earth Sciences, and Finance, as well as the Department of Fisheries. In addition to these are the state governments, the district administration, police, etc. The involvement of such an array of agencies invariably leads to coordination problems.
 - Similarly, issuing of id cards to fishermen is an important issue but keeping track of the fishermen and those who lend boats or dhows to others has also proven to be a challenge.
- **Reluctance of states to contribute to coastal security:** The establishment of marine police stations was thought to mitigate several of the on ground threats. However, setting up of marine police stations has been slow because of states' reluctance. In Odisha, for example, a CAG report discovered a shortage of manpower, lack of interceptor boats, no infrastructure and poor training of marine police personnel. This tussle between the states and the centre is a recurrent theme of the debates on failing coastal security.

Preparedness of India

- **Three layered Surveillance System**
 - A multilayered system of surveillance of the country's maritime domain involving the Indian navy, coast guard, marine police, customs, and the fishermen had come into being following the series of measures that were implemented over the years to secure India's coasts prior to the Mumbai terrorist attacks in 2008.
 - Under the system, the outer layer (beyond 50 nautical) was patrolled by the Indian naval and coast guard ships and aircraft; the intermediate layers (25-50 nautical miles) was patrolled by the ships of the Indian navy and the ICG as well as hired trawlers; and the inner layer i.e. the territorial waters (shoreline to 12 nautical miles), was patrolled by the joint patrolling team and later by the marine police.
 - A similar system was also functional along the Tamil Nadu coast, but with slight modifications.
 - Post the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, the existing multilayered arrangements have been further strengthened, as also extended to cover the entire coastline of the country.

- **Coastal Security Scheme**

- An existing Coastal Security Scheme (originally instituted in 2005) was accelerated, with greater fund allocations for coastal infrastructure, including police stations and radar stations along India's coastline.
- The aim of the CSS is to strengthen infrastructure for patrolling and the surveillance of the coastal areas, particularly the shallow areas close to the coast.
- The scheme envisaged the establishment of coastal police stations equipped with boats, jeeps and motorcycles for mobility on the coast.
- **Joint operations centers:** Joint operations centers set up by the Indian Navy as command and control hubs for coastal security at Mumbai, Visakhapatnam, Kochi and Port Blair have also become fully operational. Paramilitary forces and the Indian Army have also been manning open riverine spaces in North India to thwart infiltration attempts.
- **Monitoring, Control and Surveillance of Fishermen:** Steps have been taken to ensure the safety of fishermen, and to prevent the undetected entry of any fishing trawler in the coastal waters. For this purpose, all big fishing trawlers (20 meters and above) are being installed with AIS type B transponders. As for small fishing vessels, a proposal to fit them with the Radio Frequency Identification Device (RFID) is under consideration.

Conclusion:

- Hence, post Mumbai attacks there is realization by the authorities for enhancement of capacity and infrastructure for the maritime agencies involved in coastal security.
- There is need to work on creating seamless interaction between various agencies involved in the coastal security apparatus to keep pace with the security challenges.