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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. India needs to stop looking at only South Asia as its "neighbourhood" and instead, evolve a more rational and realistic understanding of its "strategic frontiers". Discuss. (250 words)

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Approach

- Introduce with India foreign policy tilt towards South Asia
- Discuss the challenges in the region
- Mention why India needs to explore its strategic frontiers, the benefits and challenges of the same

Introduction:

- India desires a peaceful and stable environment for its development, and the government has clearly indicated its priority for building stronger ties with its South Asian neighbours.
- "Neighbourhood First" policy is an example of India's focus on the development and progress of South Asia.

Body:

Issues in the region:

- The region is home to the world's 400 million poor people, which means nearly 30 per cent of the region's population lives below the poverty line. All the SAARC countries have a rather low ranking on the human development index (HDI).
- The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) came into being to promote intraregional connectivity through trade but intra-SAARC trade stands at a meagre 5%.
- The tensions between the two leading powers of South Asia have caused great damage to the region, often stunting its growth and development.
- Thus, we need to think more rationally and beyond our South Asia frontiers.

Strategic Frontier and the need

- A Strategic Frontier is that unexplored area of potential growth that lies beyond today's business and encompasses tomorrow's opportunities, if discovered.
- Our Free Trade Agreements with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreements with Japan and South Korea now place us in parallel with the dynamic, fast-growing countries to our east.
- It has also been augmented by strategic partnerships with countries across East and South-East Asia. India's Act East policy has been a harbinger in this front.

- As we grow in international stature, our defense strategies should naturally reflect our political, economic and security concerns, extending well beyond the geographical confines of South Asia. For instance, India has been expanding its reach and relationship depth with U.S., Middle East, Africa, Australia, Seychelles and other island nations.
- Our security environment ranges from the Persian Gulf to the Straits of Malacca across the Indian Ocean, includes Central Asia and Afghanistan in the North West, China in the North East and South East Asia. Our strategic thinking should also extend to these horizons.

Challenges:- India's strategic frontiers clash and will be in conflict with those of China. It also runs aground where Pakistan is concerned, such as in SAARC initiative, which needs to be smoothed out with strategic thinking.

Conclusion

India has been traditionally more closely associated with South East region due to converging interests in trade, tourism, issues with China etc. through SAARC, ASEAN. but given continuously changing global paradigms and having a troublesome neighbourhood India needs to be more pragmatic and explore and invest in its strategic frontiers.