India's Coastal Security

- India's **7,516-kilometre-long coastline** includes 5,422 kilometres of coastline on the mainland and 2,094 kilometres on the islands **belonging to nine states** and **four Union Territories**.
- The coastline **accounts for 90% of the country's trade** and it spans 3,331 coastal villages and 1,382 islands.
- The coastline houses **12 major and 200 minor ports**, along with 95 landing centres, and is increasingly facing security challenges from adversarial neighbours and non-state actors.
- This has necessitated the adoption of a more structured and holistic approach with a long-term strategy to modernise, update and strengthen naval surveillance and to plug loopholes in coastal security architecture.

Need for Coastal Security

India's coasts have always been vulnerable to criminals and anti-national activities. Numerous cases of the smuggling of goods, gold, narcotics, explosives, arms and ammunition as well as the infiltration of terrorists into the country through these coasts have been reported over the years.

Factors that add to vulnerabilities of Indian coastline:

- **Maritime terrorism:** hijacking, attacking, and sinking ships, taking hostages, sabotaging pipelines, and attacking cities and strategic installations like naval bases and petrochemical storages.
    - **Attacks on commercial centres:** the 26/11 terror strike in Mumbai in 2008 targeted two iconic hotels (the Taj Palace and Towers and the Oberoi Trident) and a Jewish centre (the Chabad House).
    - **Attacks on Ports and other strategic facilities:** ports handling large volumes of traffic especially oil and other goods and having a large population centre in its vicinity are most valued targets for the terrorists.
    - **Attacks on Ships:** ships are soft targets for the terrorist groups as, except for

their enormous size, they have practically no means of protection.

Ships could be hijacked, attacked by rockets, grenades and firearms, or packed with explosives and destroyed.

- **Piracy and armed robbery** pose a major threat to sea navigation.

  Shallow waters of the **Sunderbans** have been witnessing acts of violence and armed robbery.
- **Smuggling and trafficking:** Indian coasts have been susceptible to smuggling of items such as gold, electronic goods, narcotics, and arms.
- **Infiltration, illegal migration and refugee influx:** large scale refugee influxes over the decades have resulted in widespread **political turmoil** in the border states. For example-
  - The creek areas of **Gujarat** which has its geographical proximity to Pakistan and has complex terrain conducive for infiltration.
  - Political turmoil, religious and political persecution, overwhelming poverty, and lack of opportunities in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh is an ideal situation for **illegal** migration of **Bangladeshi citizens** to India.
- The frequent straying of fishermen into neighbouring country waters has not only **jeopardised the safety of the fishermen** but has also raised **national security** concerns.

Government Initiatives in Coastal Security Infrastructure

- **National Committee for Strengthening Maritime and Coastal Security** headed by Cabinet Secretary coordinates all matters related to Maritime and Coastal Security.
- **Indian Coast Guard:** custom marine organization was merged with the India coast guard and was entrusted with the following responsibilities:
  - Law enforcement in India's jurisdictional waters
  - Safety and protection of:
    - artificial islands
    - offshore terminals
    - Installations and other structures and devices in any maritime zone
    - Fishermen and providing them assistance at sea while in distress.
  - Assisting the customs and other authorities in anti-smuggling operations.
- **Coastal Security Measures during the 1990s:**

  Two joint operations namely were launched:
    - **Operation Tasha:** launched by Indian navy to prevent illegal immigration and the infiltration of **LTTE militants** to and from Sri Lanka.
    - **Operation Swan:** launched in the immediate aftermath of the **Mumbai bomb blasts** with aim to prevent landings of contraband and illegal infiltration along the Maharashtra and Gujarat coasts.
- **Coastal Security Measures Post Kargil war:** Kargil Review Committee (KRC) constituted to study the circumstances that had led to the war has recommended

several coastal security measures like:

- Specialised marine police
- Strengthening of the ICG
- Creating fishermen watch groups
- Installing vessel traffic management systems in major ports
- Setting up Joint operation centres (JOCs)
- Creating an apex body for the management of maritime affairs

- **Marine Police Force:** under the Coastal Security Scheme (2005) marine police force was created with the aim to strengthen infrastructure for patrolling and the surveillance of the coastal areas, particularly the shallow areas close to the coast.
  - The marine police force was required to work closely with the ICG under the **'hub-and-spoke' concept**, the 'hub' being the ICG station and the 'spokes' being the coastal police stations.

- **Coastal Security Architecture:** post the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, the existing **multilayered arrangements** have been further strengthened, and other initiatives like:
  - **National Investigation Agency,** was set up in 2009 to deal with terrorist offences.
  - **National Security Guard** have been created to ensure rapid response to terror attacks.
  - The **National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID)** has been constituted to create an appropriate database of security-related information.
  - **A three-tier security grid** was installed with the **Indian Navy, the coast guard, and the marine police** jointly patrolling India's near-seas.

- **Electronic Surveillance:** National Command Control Communication and Intelligence Network (NC3I) has been launched to provide near gapless surveillance of the entire coastline and prevent the intrusion of undetected vessels, the coastal surveillance network project. It comprises:
  - Coastal radar chain
  - Automatic identification system (AIS)
  - Vessel traffic management and information system (VTMS)

Challenges

- **Lack of coordination:** The involvement of different agencies and ministries at centre, state and local level invariably leads to coordination problems although several efforts have been made to create greater synergies between them like:
  - Formulation of Standard Operating Procedures.
  - The Conduct of Joint Coastal Security Exercise.
  - Setting up of coordination committees.
- **Lack of clarity** among various stakeholders about their roles in ensuring coastal security.

- Acute **shortage of manpower** in police stations, (only 25% of the sanction)
- **Poor Training:** Lack of a dedicated **training academy** for the ICG.
- **Discontent in fishermen communities** interferes with the effective functioning of the coastal security architecture as fishermen are considered the **'eyes and ears'** of the coastal security architecture and, therefore, an integral part of it.
- Difficult **terrain, seasonal weather patterns, administrative lapses,** etc. all contribute towards introducing gaps in surveillance and the monitoring mechanism.
- Delays in **land acquisition** and **support infrastructure,** such as barracks and staff quarters at several locations.
- Low **infrastructure** creation (only 31%):
  - Jetties under the Coastal Security Scheme were yet to be constructed. Use of fisheries' piers by coastal police at extended distances from Coastal Police Stations (CSS)..
- Below par state-level **monitoring** mechanisms.

Way Forward

- **Surveillance and interagency coordination**
  - Beyond expediting the installation of coastal radar chains and AIS stations and ensuring broad access to information, the authorities must ensure the mandatory fitment of AIS on power-driven vessels with a length more than 10m.
  - The central government must address the problems of coordination arising out of the interactions of multiple agencies (with overlapping jurisdictions) and delayed responses.
- **Stronger involvement of coastal police**
  - Instead of setting up a coastal border security force with no legal powers, the authorities must move to strengthen and better integrate the coastal police into the littoral security architecture.
- **A legislative framework**
  - **Comprehensive legislations** to place systems and processes for the protection of India's **maritime infrastructure**, covering both the shipping and port sectors.
  - **Statutory duties** of government departments, Port trusts, state maritime boards, non-major ports and private terminal operators and other stakeholders need to be clearly outlined, as also minimum standards of port security requiring statutory compliance.
- **Strengthening of the Coast Guard**
  - The CG must be strengthened to play a leadership role in coastal security.
  - **Ambiguities** from the Coast Guard Act need to be removed to ensure all security agencies are clear about the roles and responsibilities they are expected to perform.
- **National commercial maritime security policy document**

- The government must promulgate a **National Commercial Maritime Security** Policy Document, to articulate its strategic vision for maritime security.
- It must also promulgate a **national strategy for Commercial Maritime Security** for efficient, coordinated, and effective action for protection of the port and shipping infrastructure.

- **Reinforce Coastal Regulation Zone regulations**

  There is an apprehension among environmentalists that CRZ laws are being diluted in favour of tourism, shrimp farming and industry lobby groups, without taking into consideration the views of experts or the public.

- **Coastal security exercises like sagar kavach and <u>sea vigil</u>** need to be conducted regularly, in order to generate awareness about threats emanating from the sea as well as to develop synergies among the concerned agencies.