Illegal fishing in the Indo-Pacific

What is the issue?

The unregulated plunder of global fishing stock by China poses a grave threat to the livelihood and food security of millions of people.

What is IUU fishing?

- Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing is a broad term that captures a wide variety of fishing activity.
- **Illegal fishing –** It is conducted by foreign vessels in waters under the jurisdiction of a State, without the permission of that State, or in contravention of its laws and regulations.
- **Unreported fishing –** Fishing which have not been reported, or have been misreported, to the relevant national authority, in contravention of national laws and regulations.
- **Unregulated fishing –** It is conducted by relevant regional fisheries management organisation that is inconsistent with State responsibilities for the conservation of living marine resources under international law.
- It is conducted by
    - By vessels without nationality
    - by those flying the flag of a State not party to that organization
    - by a fishing entity

Why is illegal fishing seen as such a big threat?

- Globally, fish provide about 3.3 billion people with 20% of their average animal protein intake.
- Around 60 million people are engaged in fishing activities globally.
- The unregulated plunder of global fishing stock poses a grave threat to the livelihood and food security of millions of people.
- It is difficult to precisely quantify economic loss from illegal fishing. Some estimates peg it around USD 20 billion annually.
- Collapse of fisheries can destabilise coastal nations and pose a much bigger security risk. This can fuel human trafficking, drug crime and terror recruiting.
- This will also result in serious ecological damage.

Why is China blamed for IUU fishing?

- The 2021 IUU Fishing Index, which maps 152 coastal countries, ranked China as the worst offender.
- China is considered responsible for 80% to 95% illegal fishing in the Indo pacific region after having overfished its own waters.
- China is known to incentivise illegal fishing with generous subsidies to meet its growing domestic demand.
- China’s distant-water fishing (CDWF) is the largest in the world (17000 vessels).
- These vessels, which can scoop staggering amounts of catch on every single voyage. They also employ destructive practise of bottom trawling.
- China also uses them to project strategic influence and to bully fishing vessels from weaker

nations.

How Quad plans to deter China?

- Quad nations are getting ready to unveil a maritime surveillance initiative to protect exclusive economic zones in the Indo-Pacific against environmental damage.
- The aim is to push back massive and reckless deep water fishing by Chinese trawlers in the region.
- The idea is to monitor illicit fishing vessels that have their AIS (automatic identification system) transponders turned off to evade tracking.
- The initiative will use satellite technology to connect existing surveillance centres in India, Singapore and the Pacific.
- This will help establish a tracking system to combat IUU fishing.
- The satellite-enabled dragnet will track IUU fishing activities from the Indian Ocean and South-east Asia to the South Pacific.
- The move by the Quad security group is also seen to be aimed at reducing the small Pacific island nations' growing reliance on China.

Reference

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