India and Djibouti

Why in news?

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- President Ram Nath Govind is to make his maiden visit as President to Djibouti.
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- He will also be the first Indian President or Prime Minister to visit Djibouti, a part of the Horn of Africa.
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What is the significance?

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- The four different states constituting the Horn are Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti.
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- These four states, along with Yemen across the Red Sea, have long been described as one of the world’s pivotal regions.
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- Djibouti’s population is less than a million and its land is largely barren.
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- However, making it geo-politically significant is its location -
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1. at the crossroads connecting Africa, the Middle East and Asia.
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2. at the confluence of the Red Sea with the Indian Ocean.
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- The visit signifies India's willingness to end its prolonged neglect of Djibouti and re-engage with the region strategically.

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How has the relation progressed?

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- The East India Company occupied Aden in 1839 and administered it until 1937.
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- Subsequently, the creation of the British Somaliland in 1889 gave it hold over the straits that controlled access to the Indian Ocean.
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- Britain saw the presence as essential to India’s security and economic prosperity because of the following factors:
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1. protection of sea lines of communication.
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2. control over the choke points.
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3. maintaining access to major islands of the Indian Ocean.
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- However, Independent India discarded this geopolitical thinking.
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- This is because of India's inward economic orientation and the policies of non-alignment and military isolationism.
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- India does not even have an embassy in Djibouti.
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- Nevertheless, India's economic globalisation in the 1990s and its growing commerce demanded a change.
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- Also, the new reliance on the sea lines of communication for economic growth rejuvenated India's maritime sensibility.
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- India declared that its national interests were no longer limited to the subcontinent but stretched from the “Aden to Malacca”.
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- Also, the President of Djibouti is now keen on utilising its strategic location

for economic fortune and is seeking investments.
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What are the future prospects?

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- China is raising its strategic profile in the region through -
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1. infrastructure development in the Horn of Africa.
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2. the One Belt and One Road (OBOR) initiative.
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3. the recent first ever foreign military base for China, in Djibouti.
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4. the rail link project between landlocked Ethiopia and Djibouti, etc.
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- In addition, countries like France, Japan, Italy, US and regional powers like UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, etc are increasing their military presence in Djibouti.
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- At the 2015 Africa summit in Delhi, most participating leaders wanted an expansion of security and defence cooperation with India.
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- Defence diplomacy has thus become an important imperative for India all across the Indian Ocean region.
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- India is relatively late to join, but the President’s visit is hopeful of laying the foundations for engagement with Djibouti and the Horn of Africa.
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Source: Indian Express

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