India & South Pacific

Why in news?

The visit of the Indian PM to south pacific region, reflects India's global status, and its significance of its engagement with Pacific Island Countries (PICs) and the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC).

What are the PICs?

- PICs is a cluster of 14 island nations dotting the Southwestern Pacific: the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.
- All these islands are located at the crossroads of strategically important maritime trade corridors.
- Of the 14 PICs, Fiji and Papua New Guinea (PNG) are the ones with the biggest populations and the most heft.



What is the relationship between India with Fiji and PNG?

- India's interaction with the PICs has traditionally focused on its engagement with Fiji and PNG, mainly due to the presence of a large diaspora.
- About 37% of Fiji's 849,000 population (2009 estimates) is of Indian origin, and about 3,000 Indians live in PNG.



What is the relationship between India and Pacific Island Countries (PICs)?

- **Fiji and Papua New Guinea** - India's interaction with the PICs has traditionally focused on its engagement with Fiji and PNG, mainly due to the presence of a large diaspora.
- **India's Act East Policy** - Indian officials say the engagement with the 14 PICs is part of India's Act East Policy.
- **Strengthen India's engagement** - The visit aimed to strengthen India's engagement with the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) and the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC).
- **Reassuring presence** - India aimed to establish a reassuring presence in the region that is not solely based on financial assistance.
- **Global South** - India to amplify the voice of global south in international forums.
- **South-South cooperation** - India's engagement with the PICs includes development assistance through South-South Cooperation.

- This assistance takes the form of capacity building, training, scholarships, grants, and loans.
- Community development projects, such as solar electrification, supply of agricultural equipment, and infrastructure development, are also part of India's engagement.
- **Climate Change and Resilience** - India's initiatives such as International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) complement its relationship with the PICs.
- **Reliable Partner** - Recent visit by Prime Minister Modi has emphasized India's role as a reliable partner to the PICs.
- **FIPIC** - Prime Minister Modi attended FIPIC which was held at Papua New Guinea.
- **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)** - Provided by India to PICs during critical times which includes supply of covid-19 vaccines.
- India aims to be a development partner based on mutual respect and aligned with the priorities of the PICs.

What is the status of China in Pacific Island Countries (PICs)?

- China has made forays into the Pacific Islands through economic incentives and has sought to boost its security relationship with the island states.
- There is an increasing rivalry between China and the US and its allies in the region.
- China’s increasing presence in the region has unnerved the US and has caused alarm in Australia and New Zealand.
- China’s development support peaked in 2016, and its loans and grants amounted to 8% of all foreign aid to the area between 2011 and 2017, surpassing the US’s 0.3% over the same period.

References

1. The Indian Express | India’s Prominence In South Pacific
2. India Today | China looming, India steps up presence in south Pacific

