SHANTI – India's Cooperative Security Vision

Mains: *GS II – International Relation*

Why in News?

Recently, External Affairs Minister introduced "SHANTI" while announcing India's candidature for the "UN Security Council (2028-29)".

What is SHANTI?

- **SHANTI –** It stands for ***Securing Holistic Advancement through Norms, Trust and Integrity.***
- It is conceptualized as a normative framework intended to govern shared maritime spaces.
- **Evolution –** It operationalises the vision of **SAGAR** (Security and Growth for All in the Region), 2015.
- It extends the scope of **MAHASAGAR** (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions), 2025.
- **Core Philosophy –** It represents a shift in security thinking from competition to demand-driven cooperation
    - From influence to non-prescriptive institution-building.
    - From Deterrence to Resilience
    - From Rivalry to Shared Responsibility
    - From Crisis Response to Long-term Governance
    - From Power Projection to Cooperative Capacity-building.

> ***SHANTI*** *is primarily a maritime-security and cooperation framework, not merely a military exercise. The proposed BIMSTEC joint exercise can become one instrument to operationalise it.*

What is the proposed framework of SHANTI?

- **Adherence to Rules and Norms –** Emphasizes respect for the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and international maritime law.
- **Trust-based Cooperation –** Prioritizes collaboration rather than coercive approaches.
- **Integrity in Partnerships** – Advocates for transparency, inclusiveness, and respect for national sovereignty.
- **Demand-driven Capacity Building –** Initiatives are tailored to the specific requirements of partner countries.
- **Comprehensive Maritime Resilience –** Expands the focus beyond traditional military security to encompass broader maritime challenges.

What are the key advantages of implementing SHANTI?

- **Common framework –** It establishes unified principles that align previously fragmented institutions, thereby facilitating more effective cooperation.
- **Addressing non-traditional threats –** It involves mitigating shared vulnerabilities such as climate-related disasters, illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and cyber risks.
- **Preferred partnership model –** This positions India not only as a first responder but also as the preferred regional security partner.
- **Disaster Preparedness –** Implementation of joint drills, establishment of early-warning systems, pre-positioning of relief supplies, and acceleration of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations.
- **Maritime Awareness –** Enhancement of vessel tracking, information sharing, anti-piracy and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing measures, as well as protection of maritime infrastructure.

- **Trust Building –** Promotion of dialogue, reduction of mutual suspicion, encouragement of cooperative behavior, and recognition of India's role as a first responder.
- **Institutional Alignment –** It harmonises BIMSTEC, IORA, ASEAN, IONS, Colombo Conclave.
- **Countering Geopolitical Competition –** Offers a trust-based alternative to China's port and infrastructure-driven influence.
- **Global South Model –** Positions India's cooperative maritime governance as a replicable template for the Indo-Pacific and Global South, emphasizing a shift from rivalry to shared responsibility.

Bay of Bengal – Ideal Anchor for SHANTI

• The Bay of Bengal forms an interconnected maritime system in which cyclones, pollution, fish stocks, shipping routes, and security threats extend beyond national borders.
• **Common regional challenges -**
- Coastal countries in the region face similar threats:
- Frequent cyclones, tsunamis, floods and coastal erosion;
- Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing;
- Marine pollution and degradation of coastal ecosystems;
- Piracy, trafficking, drug smuggling and human trafficking;
- Vulnerability of ports, shipping lanes and undersea communication cables;
- Cybersecurity threats to maritime infrastructure;
- Supply-chain disruptions and energy insecurity.
• Because no single country can address these threats alone, the Bay requires a cooperative, rules-based regional response.

What are key strategic locational benefits of conducting SHANTI in Bay of Bengal?

- **Historical and Cultural Conduit** – The Bay of Bengal has facilitated enduring exchanges in trade, culture, and ideas between South and Southeast Asia, predating contemporary diplomatic structures.
- **Geopolitical Support –** The region connects India's Act East Policy with ASEAN and grants access to the strategically vital Malacca Strait, a key chokepoint in global trade and the so-called "Malacca Dilemma."
- **Cooperative Space –** It is an interconnected system where cyclones, fish stocks, and shipping lanes create shared challenges.
- **Governable Strategic Space –** In contrast to the conflict-prone western Indian Ocean, the strategic geography of the Bay of Bengal is more favorable to cooperation than to contestation.
- **Andaman and Nicobar Islands –** Located near the western entrance of the Malacca Strait.
- They provide India with strategic oversight of vital sea lanes of communication.
- **Trade, Connectivity and Blue Economy Potential –** The Bay hosts major ports, including Chennai, Kolkata, Chattogram, Colombo, Sittwe, and Yangon.
- It supports key projects such as:
    - India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway.
    - Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project.
    - BIMSTEC connectivity initiatives.

- Coastal shipping and port-led development.

What are the key challenges?

- **Strategic mistrust –** It results from divergent threat perceptions and a prevailing caution regarding alignment with major powers.
- **Institutional fragmentation –** It is demonstrated by the existence of multiple organizations, overlapping mandates, and isolated operational structures.
- **Capacity asymmetry –** It persists as smaller states lack naval, financial, and technological resources, necessitating a demand-driven approach from India.
- **China presence –** It complicates regional consensus, highlighting the importance of avoiding exclusionary frameworks.
- **Domestic instability –** It encompassing political and economic crises, impedes the prospects for sustained regional cooperation.

What lies ahead?

- **BIMSTEC Maritime Exercise –** Conduct annual or biennial drills with navies, coast guards, and disaster management agencies emphasizing HADR, SAR, anti-piracy operations, and pollution response.
- **White-Shipping Arrangement –** Facilitate real-time sharing of commercial shipping data to enhance maritime domain awareness and counter illegal activities.
- **HADR Coordination Mechanism –** Establish common standard operating procedures (SOPs), develop regional stockpiles and logistics hubs, and integrate early warning systems.
- **Blue Economy Cooperation –** Promote joint management of fisheries, implement pollution control measures, develop climate-resilient ports, and protect regional livelihoods.
- **Legal and Normative Cooperation –** Reaffirm commitment to the UNCLOS, establish common norms regarding environmental protection, cyber resilience, undersea cable security, and peaceful dispute resolution.
- **Inclusiveness –** Ensure a cooperative, sovereignty-respecting, open framework prioritizing regional public goods over dominance.

Reference

The Hindu | Bay of Bengal as India’s SHANTI Anchor

SHANKAR
IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering