



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**SHANTI: INDIA'S EMERGING MARITIME
SECURITY FRAMEWORK FOR THE BAY
OF BENGAL**

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SHANTI: INDIA'S EMERGING MARITIME SECURITY FRAMEWORK FOR THE BAY OF BENGAL

Context

- With India's recent bid for the **UNSC (2028-29)** being announced, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has brought up **SHANTI (Securing Holistic Advancement through Norms, Trust and Integrity)** as the next phase of **India's marine vision after SAGAR and MAHASAGAR**.

Why is the Bay of Bengal Strategically Important?

- The **Bay of Bengal** has emerged as the strategic fulcrum of **India's maritime vision** due to its economic, geopolitical and security significance.
- Traditional military-centric tactics are not sufficient to tackle the expanding **non-traditional security concerns** such as climate-induced disasters, illegal fishing, cyber hazards, supply chain disruptions and maritime pollution in the region.
- India has suggested the normative framework of **SHANTI (Securing Holistic Advancement through Norms, Trust and Integrity)** to enhance cooperative marine governance.

Geostrategic Significance

- The Bay of Bengal is the maritime bridge connecting South and Southeast Asia. It links the **Act East Policy of India with ASEAN**.
 - It gives access to the Strait of Malacca, one of the world's largest marine commerce routes.
 - It is a critical element in the larger Indo-Pacific strategic architecture.
- Economic Importance:** It has important sea lanes for world trade and energy sources. It promotes the **Blue Economy** in the areas of fisheries, ports, offshore resources and marine trade. It is an important part of the regional connectivity activities under **BIMSTEC**.

Evolution of India's Maritime Vision

- Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), 2015:** It highlighted inclusive maritime development, regional security cooperation, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), and capacity building among Indian Ocean littorals.
- Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth throughout Regions (MAHASAGAR), 2025:** It broadened India's outlook by acknowledging interlinked security issues, enhancing collaboration throughout the Indo-Pacific and the Global South, and fostering comprehensive marine alliances.
- SHANTI (2026):** It was launched together with India's candidature for the **UN Security Council (2028-29)**. It spells out the way it will be implemented, assuming **SAGAR** was India's marine vision and **MAHASAGAR** increased its geographical ambit. It lays down the **operational principles** for maritime cooperation by focusing on:
 - Norms:** Respect for international law and appropriate maritime behaviour.
 - Trust:** Building confidence and sharing information.
 - Integrity:** Open, inclusive and rules-based government.

Why is SHANTI Needed?

- The Bay of Bengal has a number of similar concerns that transcend country boundaries:
 - Natural disasters and cyclone recurrence;
 - Coastal erosion and sea-level rise;
 - Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing;

- ♦ Maritime pollution;
- ♦ Protection of undersea communication cables;
- ♦ Cyber vulnerabilities affecting ports;
- ♦ Supply chain disruptions;

Role of BIMSTEC in Operationalising SHANTI

- The **Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)** is the most ideal venue for the implementation of **SHANTI**.
- Recent advancements are:
 - ♦ **Common standards for maritime law** enforcement agreed.
 - ♦ Enhanced cooperation on **humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR)**.
 - ♦ Proposal for **White Shipping Information Sharing** to Improve Maritime Domain Awareness
 - ♦ Decision to hold the **first BIMSTEC Joint Maritime Security Exercise (2026)**.
- These efforts promote regional resilience while preserving the sovereignty of member states.

Significance for India

- SHANTI increases India's capacity to:
 - ♦ A partner of choice for security in the Indian Ocean region.
 - ♦ The first response in the area for natural calamities.
 - ♦ A champion of the rules-based order in the seas.
 - ♦ A facilitator of inclusive regional government, not strategic hegemony.
- The framework also compliments the '**Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**' vision of India as it promotes common security and sustainable maritime development.

Challenges

- Bay strategic competition, particularly with rising Chinese maritime dominance.
- Institutional overlap between BIMSTEC, IORA, ASEAN-led processes and other regional fora.
- Limited financial and technical capabilities of smaller littoral states.
- National sovereignty vs greater regional collaboration.
- Climate change exacerbates humanitarian and ecological risks.

Way Forward

- Institutionalise regular BIMSTEC maritime drills and HADR coordination.
- Enhance Maritime Domain Awareness through secure information-sharing processes.
- Support Sustainable Blue Economy activities, maritime environment protection.
- Build coastal resilience with climate adaptation and catastrophe preparedness.
- SHANTI should be aligned with international standards such as the **UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)** and the **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)** framework.

Conclusions

- India has a chance to shift maritime security from a competition-based approach to one of cooperation, resilience, and shared responsibility in the Bay of Bengal.
- SHANTI is a living example of this transformation, putting norms, trust and integrity at the center of regional governance.
- Executed successfully through BIMSTEC and other regional structures, it may be a role model for the entire Indo-Pacific, strengthening India's position as a responsible maritime stakeholder and promoting a stable, secure and prosperous Indian Ocean Region.

Daily Mains Practice Question

- [Q] The Bay of Bengal has emerged as a suitable maritime sub-region for operationalising India's Securing Holistic Advancement through Norms, Trust and Integrity (SHANTI). Discuss the significance of SHANTI in strengthening regional maritime governance and cooperative security in the Indo-Pacific.

Source: TH

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