NEXT IAS

DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

REVIVING COASTAL HERITAGE FOR AN INCLUSIVE BLUE ECONOMY

REVIVING COASTAL HERITAGE FOR AN INCLUSIVE BLUE ECONOMY

Context

- The blue economy is gaining policy attention as India expands maritime infrastructure, fisheries, ocean technology and coastal development while seeking inclusive and sustainable growth.

About Blue Economy

- The **Blue Economy** refers to the sustainable use of ocean and coastal resources for economic growth, livelihoods and ecological conservation.
- It covers fisheries and aquaculture, shipping and ports, coastal tourism, offshore renewable energy, marine biotechnology and emerging sectors such as deep-sea minerals.
- For India, the ocean is both an economic opportunity and a livelihood base for millions of people.
    - India has a **11,098.81 km coastline (**National Hydrographic Office**), 13 major ports and an extensive Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)**, and **nearly 35% of the population** live within 100 km of the country's coast line.

Significance of Blue Economy

- **Economic growth:** Supports shipping, ports, fisheries, tourism and emerging ocean industries.
- **Employment and livelihoods:** Sustains fishing and coastal communities and creates new skilled jobs.
- **Food and nutritional security:** Fisheries and aquaculture provide affordable animal protein and livelihoods.
- **Energy security:** Offshore wind, tidal energy and ocean-based technologies can diversify the energy mix.
- **Climate resilience:** Mangroves, seagrasses and salt marshes provide important **blue-carbon** sinks and coastal protection.
- **Strategic importance:** Maritime infrastructure strengthens India's role in the **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)** and global supply chains.
- **Cultural value:** Traditional fishing practices, boat-building and maritime heritage preserve local knowledge and identity.

India's Recent Steps & Collaborations

- India has adopted a multi-dimensional approach through:
    - **Sagarmala Programme** for port-led development, coastal connectivity and logistics efficiency.
    - **Deep Ocean Mission** for deep-sea exploration, ocean science, biodiversity and resource assessment.
    - **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)** to modernise fisheries, strengthen infrastructure and improve fisher livelihoods.
    - **Blue Revolution and sustainable aquaculture initiatives** to enhance productivity while reducing ecological pressure.
    - **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)**, with marine ecology, resources and disaster-risk reduction as important areas of cooperation.
    - Engagement through **IORA** and other Indian Ocean partnerships on sustainable fisheries, marine research and ocean governance.

Global Efforts Related to Blue Economy

- The **UN Sustainable Development Goal 14** promotes conservation and sustainable use of oceans. The **UN Decade of Ocean Science (2021–2030)** seeks better scientific knowledge for sustainable ocean management.
    - The **BBNJ Agreement** strengthens conservation of marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction.
- The **World Bank's PROBLUE programme** and **OECD work** on sustainable ocean economies also emphasise investment, governance and inclusive growth.

Related Issues & Concerns

- Rapid blue growth can become **'blue grabbing'** if ports, tourism and offshore projects displace small-scale fishers or restrict traditional access to coastal resources.

- Other concerns include:
    - Overfishing and declining fish stocks.
    - Plastic and chemical pollution.
    - Coastal erosion, cyclones and sea-level rise.
    - Habitat destruction, including mangrove and coral degradation.
    - Unequal distribution of tourism and port revenues.
    - Poor working conditions and abandonment risks for seafarers.
    - Gender inequality: women perform a major share of post-harvest fisheries work but remain underrepresented in maritime decision-making.
    - Limited integration of traditional ecological knowledge into formal governance.

Case Studies: India & World

- **Kumbalangi, Kerala:** Community-based tourism around fishing traditions, coir-making and Chinese fishing nets demonstrates how local culture can generate supplementary livelihoods.
- **Chilika Lake, Odisha:** Community participation in fisheries management and livelihood diversification illustrates the importance of balancing ecological conservation with fisher interests.
- **Seychelles:** Marine protection combined with tourism demonstrates how visitor revenues can support ecosystem conservation.
- **Zanzibar:** Traditional dhow-building illustrates how maritime heritage can become a source of cultural tourism and artisan livelihoods.

Way Forward: Sustainable Blue Economy

- India should move from a **'blue growth' to a 'blue regeneration'** model.
- Make coastal communities **co-owners**, not merely beneficiaries, through statutory representation in fisheries, tourism and port planning.
- Mandate **local hiring and revenue-sharing** in coastal projects.
- Integrate traditional ecological knowledge with modern marine science.
- Expand **ocean literacy, vocational training and reskilling** in fishing districts.
- Promote women-led fisheries enterprises, ecotourism and marine value chains.
- Strengthen marine spatial planning, sustainable fisheries and ecosystem restoration.
- Recognise **maritime heritage** i.e. boat-building, museums, festivals and historic ports as an economic asset.

Conclusion

- India's blue economy can become an engine of **inclusive growth, ecological security and maritime power** only when coastal communities have a meaningful voice in shaping it.
- The objective should be not merely to extract greater value from the ocean, but to ensure that the ocean economy **strengthens the people and ecosystems that have sustained it for generations**.

Source: ORF Online

Daily Mains Practice Question

[Q] **Discuss the significance of coastal heritage in strengthening local economies, conserving traditional ecological knowledge and promoting community participation in ocean governance.**