



SAGAR - GS II AND III MAINS

Q. SAGAR addresses a significant policy gap, brings maritime issues to the core of Indian foreign policy, and emphasizes the vital connection between the blue economy, maritime security, and maritime cooperation. Elucidate (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *Assessing India's SAGAR Plan: Challenges Override Prospects*

What's in the news?

- In recent years, India has moved away from its history of sea-blindness and has been revitalizing its economic and strategic interests in the neighbouring maritime domain for regional peace, prosperity, and progress.
- This **commitment to “collective concerns for the global commons”** drives India's outreach beyond the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), and the fulcrum of its strategy is Prime Minister Narendra Modi's **‘Security and Growth for All in the Region’ (SAGAR) plan.**

Key takeaways:

- Articulated in 2015, this plan has facilitated slow but steady progress towards New Delhi's goal of becoming a regional net security provider in the Indo-Pacific to counter increasing Chinese naval presence in the IOR.

Three-fold Strategy:

Indian engagement with the Indo-Pacific region through SAGAR is based on a threefold strategy such as

1. Setting up **institutional frameworks** for deliberate and sustained interaction.
2. Enabling partners through **capacity building.**
3. **Restructuring relationships** to address partner needs.

However, despite a range of announcements made and initiatives launched for transnational infrastructure and connectivity projects, the SAGAR plan has made less headway than anticipated. Fiscal constraints, domestic political contestation, and internal security issues are major obstacles to India's ambitious SAGAR goals.

Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR Program):

- Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) is India's strategic vision for the Indian Ocean which was unveiled in 2015.
- There is a growing understanding of the significance of **marine cooperation and security.** India hopes to strengthen its economic and security connections with its



maritime neighbours through SAGAR and help them develop their marine security capacities.

- For this, India would collaborate on information sharing, coastline surveillance, infrastructure creation, and capability enhancement.

Need for SAGAR Program:

- **China** has been influencing the Indian Ocean region via the **21st Century Maritime Silk Route**. This is a double-edged sword since their **String of Pearls approach has both political and military ramifications**. The SAGAR vision is crucial in addressing such problems in light of this setting.
- SAGAR assists in addressing the need to bolster efforts to deliver humanitarian aid in the wake of natural disasters and combat non-state actors involved in piracy and terrorism.
- India can benefit from the **Blue Economy** by taking this approach. The blue economy provides a chance to address the nation's socioeconomic issues and possibly improve connectivity with its neighbours.

Objectives of the SAGAR Program:

- To promote an environment of trust and openness.
- The willingness to be sensitive to each other's interests.
- Working to improve maritime cooperation in order to achieve sustainable regional development.
- Encouraging group action to combat maritime concerns like piracy, terrorism and newly emerging non-state entities.
- Engaging with nations outside of our borders with the intention of fostering greater confidence and encouraging adherence to international marine rules and regulations and peaceful settlement of disputes.
- Enhancing capabilities to protect interests and territories on land and at sea.
- Enhancing security and economic co-operation in the coastal area.

Importance of the SAGAR Program:

- SAGAR gives India a way to **deepen its strategic alliances with other IOR littorals in Asia and Africa**.
- Through its **capacity-building and capability upgrading programs**, SAGAR demonstrates the long-term, transparent leadership position and responsibilities that India is prepared to assume in the area.
- As maritime concerns are now at the forefront of India's foreign policy, this represents the **country's maritime renaissance**.
- When SAGAR is considered alongside other Indian maritime strategies like Project SAGARMALA, the Act East Policy, and Project Mausam, **India's role as a "net**



security provider,” its emphasis on the blue economy, etc., is key relevance becomes clear.

- India can **act as a facilitator** to foster a favourable environment in the IOR with the successful implementation of all these measures.

Strengths of the SAGAR Program:

- **India's center located in the Indian Ocean** gives India unlimited access to the Indian Ocean region, which is its biggest strength in the SAGAR effort.
- SAGAR also **enables India to preserve strategic alliances** with the African and Asian coastal nations that make up the Indian Ocean region.
- The policy gives **India a leadership position** and the responsibility to undertake capacity-building and capability-enhancement initiatives in the region, especially in a transparent way.
- India has **strong marine security forces**, shipyards, industrial complexes, financial institutions, and other resources that it may share with its neighbours.
- India has concentrated on topics like natural resource security, sustainable development, handling of natural disasters, marine pollution, and climate change that are very important to smaller states.

Challenges for the SAGAR Initiative:

- **China's increasing influence in the region.** It followed the policy of string of pearl and debt diplomacy like Sri Lanka was compelled to lease Hambantota port to China for 99 years, due to their failure to repay the loan.
- **Overexploitation of fish resource** further disturb the ecological balance, almost 74 percent of fish in the South West Indian Ocean have been caught to their maximum capacity.
- The problem of **ocean pollution** is increasing as in the most recent oil spills on the Mauritius shore.
- **Security threats** include marine muscle flexing and militarization and non-traditional dangers include terrorism, drug trafficking, and piracy.
- The problem of **excessive use of marine resources**, for instance, an IUCN report claims that deep sea mining in the IOR endangers rare species in isolated areas.
- Other problems like **unsolved sovereignty disputes** between UK and Mauritius over the Chagos Archipelago.

SAGAR addresses a significant policy gap, brings maritime issues to the core of Indian foreign policy, and emphasizes the vital connection between the blue economy, maritime security, and maritime cooperation. To establish a maritime order based on rules in the Indian Ocean region, it must be institutionalized and vigorously promoted. India's democratic, inclusive, and collaborative leadership can contribute to the region's security and sustainable progress for all. India must also take the lead in the region's effort to ensure sustainability and growth for everybody.