Syllabus subtopic: India and its Neighborhood - Relations.

Prelims and Mains focus: about India’s efforts to extend its reach in the IOR; about Vanilla islands; about India-Madagascar relations

News: India’s flood relief outreach to Madagascar will be followed up this week, as the island’s Defence Minister travels to Lucknow and Delhi from Tuesday.

Background

- The Indian navy conducted “Operation Vanilla”, with INS Airavat delivering relief material including food, clothing, medicines and water. The humanitarian gesture by New Delhi also showcased India’s strategic capabilities in the furthermost islands of the IOR under India’s policy of “Security and Growth for All in the Region”(SAGAR) for IOR islands.

- The SAGAR concept was first announced by PM Modi in March 2015, during his visit to Mauritius and other Indian Ocean islands. At the time, Madagascar, as well as Comoros and the French island of Reunion, were a part of the East and South Africa Division at the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

Reworked approach by Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)

- Recently the MEA decided to include the three islands as part of the IOR (Indian Ocean Region) desk along with Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius and Seychelles. In a December 16 circular on the decision, the MEA said the incorporation of the “Vanilla islands” as they are called, reflected “the growing strategic importance of the Indian Ocean Islands within the framework of Indo-Pacific”.

- Vanilla Islands is an affiliation of the island nations Seychelles, Madagascar, Réunion, Mauritius, Comoros, Mayotte in the Indian Ocean to form a new travel destination brand. Aim of the co-operation that has been founded on August 4, 2010 at La Réunion is to pool forces and jointly
market the region compared to the solely individual marketing of each island in the past.

- The inclusion of the region in the IOR signals the government’s increasing level of comfort with the “Indo-Pacific” concept that describes the entire neighbourhood from the coast of Africa to the U.S. west coast.

- In one of many changes, effected last week, to the MEA organisational structure, Foreign Secretary decided to club the entire Indian Ocean Region, Southern and Indo-Pacific divisions under one additional secretary (Indo-Pacific).

Cooperation in Maritime domain

- The Indian Navy undertakes Joint Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) patrols with Maldives, Seychelles and Mauritius, which have all joined India’s coastal radar chain network.

- Maritime Domain Awareness has also emerged as a high priority area and India has signed a series of white shipping agreements and logistics agreements with several countries.

- In addition, the Indian Navy has established an Information Fusion Centre (IFC) for Indian Ocean Region (IOR) at Gurugram and has invited international observers for information exchange of movements on the high seas.

About the visit of Madagascar’s Defence Minister

- It will be the first such high level visit since Delhi incorporated the island into the “Indian Ocean Region (IOR)”.

- During his visit, Madagascar’s Defence Minister is expected to discuss implementing the MoU on defence cooperation signed during President Ramnath Kovind’s visit to Antananarivo in March 2018. The Minister will
travel first to Lucknow to attend the Defexpo, and later attend the India-Africa Defence Ministers’ conference in Delhi, and hold a bilateral meeting with India’s Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.

- Madagascar’s Defence minister will also discuss the devastation in Madagascar due to flooding after a cyclone and heavy rains in the island’s north-west left at least 31 dead and affected nearly 100,000 people.

India–Madagascar relations

1. Historical relations

- Relations between Madagascar and western India began in the 18th century and regular trade dates to at least the late 19th century. Interstate relations began in 1954 when independent India established a consulate in French-controlled Madagascar. When Madagascar became independent in 1960, the consulate was upgraded to embassy status.

- In February 2011, relations were considered cordial, with several high-level officials having had exchanging visits over the course of relations. Approximately 20,000 people of Indian origin lived in Madagascar, including 2,500 Indian citizens.

- In March 2018, Ram Nath Kovind became the first Indian President to visit Madagascar. Kovind was conferred the Grand Cross of the Second Class, Madagascar’s highest honour for non-citizens, by Prime Minister of Madagascar Olivier Solonandrasan.

2. Trade and finance

- In November 2008, Exim Bank gave Madagascar a $25 million loan for agricultural improvements. As of 2011, 61 Malagasy people had received training as part of the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme.

- In March 2018, to facilitate its financial assistance programme, India decided
to offer Madagascar a US$80.7 million Line of Credit (LoC) for agriculture and mechanisation.

3. Military
India Navy operates a Coastal Surveillance Radar (CSR) station in Madagascar.

4. Geological history
In 2013, scientists discovered that Madagascar and India were part of a single continent about 85 million years ago. The sliver of land joining them is called Mauritia.