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India Proposes SHANTI Framework to Strengthen Maritime Governance and Reinforce Its UNSC 2028–29 Candidature

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Recent Developments:

- India has launched its candidature for the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Non-Permanent Membership (2028–29)** under the **SHANTI (Securing Holistic Advancement through Norms, Trust and Integrity)** framework.
- The framework projects India's vision of a **rules-based international order, inclusive multilateralism, Global South representation, future-ready peacekeeping, maritime security, and reformed global governance.**
- India also proposes the **Bay of Bengal** as the first region for operationalising SHANTI before extending the framework across the wider **Indo-Pacific.**

SHANTI Framework:

Meaning:

- **SHANTI** stands for **Securing Holistic Advancement through Norms, Trust and Integrity.**
- The framework provides an **operational model for maritime governance** based on **rules, cooperation and institutional trust.**
- The framework represents the next stage of India's evolving maritime doctrine after **SAGAR** and **MAHASAGAR.**

Evolution of India's Maritime Vision:

Initiative

Core Focus

Contribution

SAGAR (2015)

Maritime security and regional development

Established India's vision for **Security and Growth for All in the Region.**

MAHASAGAR (2025)

Indo-Pacific and Global South

Expanded India's maritime vision beyond the Indian Ocean by recognising wider regional interdependence.

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SHANTI (2026)

Norms-based maritime governance

Converts India's maritime vision into practical cooperation through **Norms, Trust and Integrity**.

Objectives of SHANTI Framework:

Rules-Based Maritime Order:

- **SHANTI** seeks to promote **international law**, peaceful dispute resolution and **freedom of navigation** across shared maritime spaces.
- The framework supports governance of the **global maritime commons** through cooperative rather than competitive approaches.

Strengthening India's Maritime Role:

- The framework seeks to position **India** as a **preferred security partner**, **first responder**, and **net security provider** in the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific.
- The framework builds upon India's record in **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)**, maritime capacity building and regional security cooperation.

Promoting Regional Cooperation:

- **SHANTI** encourages greater cooperation through **BIMSTEC**, **Colombo Security Conclave**, maritime logistics partnerships and coordinated maritime exercises.
- The framework emphasises **Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)**, information sharing and institutional coordination.

Supporting Blue Economy:

- The framework promotes sustainable utilisation of marine resources through **Blue Economy** initiatives, marine conservation and resilient coastal development.

Why is the Bay of Bengal the Ideal Pilot Region?

Cooperative Maritime Environment:

- The **Bay of Bengal** experiences relatively lower geopolitical confrontation compared to several other maritime theatres.
- Historical, cultural and economic linkages among littoral states create favourable conditions for trust-based regional cooperation.

Strategic Maritime Location:

- The Bay connects **South Asia** with **Southeast Asia**, making it central to India's **Act East Policy**.
- The region guards the western approaches to the **Strait of Malacca**, one of the world's most important maritime trade routes.
- Stability in the Bay directly contributes to India's maritime security and Indo-Pacific strategy.

Managing Shared Non-Traditional Security Threats:

- Regional cooperation is necessary to address:

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- **Climate change**, coastal erosion, sea-level rise and hyper-cyclones.
- **Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing** affecting marine livelihoods.
- **Marine pollution** and ecosystem degradation.
- **Drug trafficking**, arms smuggling and other transnational maritime crimes.
- **SHANTI** provides a common framework for coordinated regional responses.

Strengthening Existing Institutions:

- The framework strengthens existing regional institutions instead of creating new organisations.
- **BIMSTEC** can serve as the principal platform for implementing maritime governance, connectivity and Blue Economy initiatives.

Demonstrating Cooperative Leadership:

- India can demonstrate regional leadership through partnership-based capacity building rather than coercive influence.
- The framework reinforces India's image as a reliable and responsible regional stakeholder.

Significance of SHANTI Framework:

Strategic Significance:

- Marks India's transition from **maritime security provider** to **maritime governance leader**.
- Enhances India's role in shaping the evolving **Indo-Pacific strategic architecture**.
- Strengthens India's credibility as a responsible stakeholder in regional stability.

Diplomatic Significance:

- Reinforces India's campaign for **UNSC 2028–29** by highlighting its commitment to **multilateralism, peacekeeping** and **Global South priorities**.
- Demonstrates India's support for **rules-based global governance** and **reformed multilateral institutions**.

Economic Significance:

- Promotes maritime trade facilitation, resilient supply chains and regional connectivity.
- Supports growth of the **Blue Economy**, port-led development and sustainable maritime industries.

Security Significance:

- Improves regional preparedness against both **traditional** and **non-traditional maritime threats**.
- Strengthens maritime surveillance through enhanced **Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)** and information sharing.

Major Challenges in Operationalising SHANTI:

Geopolitical Challenges:

- Expanding Chinese strategic presence in the Bay of Bengal increases geopolitical competition.
- Political instability in **Myanmar** affects regional connectivity and cross-border infrastructure projects.

Connectivity Challenges:

- Fragmented customs procedures, inadequate port infrastructure and financing gaps slow regional integration.
- Delays in implementing regional transport agreements reduce connectivity benefits.

Institutional Challenges:

- Regional organisations continue to face implementation deficits despite multiple cooperation mechanisms.
- Concerns among smaller neighbours regarding asymmetric power relations may reduce trust.

Environmental Challenges:

- Climate change, cyclones, sea-level rise and marine pollution require sustained regional coordination.
- Increasing **IUU Fishing** threatens marine biodiversity and coastal livelihoods.

Maritime Security Challenges:

- Smuggling, piracy, narcotics trafficking and illegal maritime activities require integrated surveillance mechanisms.
- Diverse national capacities create uneven maritime governance across the region.

Way Forward:

Institutionalise Maritime Cooperation:

- Strengthen **BIMSTEC** through faster implementation of maritime agreements, joint exercises and coordinated policymaking.

Enhance Maritime Domain Awareness:

- Expand information sharing through the **Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)**.
- Improve satellite surveillance, coastal radar networks and digital maritime monitoring.

Promote Rules-Based Maritime Governance:

- Uphold **UNCLOS**, freedom of navigation and peaceful dispute resolution.
- Encourage transparent and inclusive maritime governance across the Indo-Pacific.

Strengthen Blue Economy Partnerships:

- Promote sustainable fisheries, marine conservation, renewable ocean energy and resilient coastal infrastructure.

Expand India's First Responder Role:

- Build regional capacities for **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)**.
- Strengthen interoperability through regular disaster response exercises and logistics cooperation.

Conclusion:

- **SHANTI** represents India's transition from a vision-centric maritime approach to an implementation-oriented governance framework.
- Successful implementation in the **Bay of Bengal** can establish a practical model for cooperative maritime governance across the wider **Indo-Pacific**, while reinforcing India's position as a responsible regional leader and strengthening its global diplomatic profile.

Value Addition for UPSC:

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Important Terms:

- **SAGAR – Security and Growth for All in the Region.**
- **MAHASAGAR – Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions.**
- **SHANTI – Securing Holistic Advancement through Norms, Trust and Integrity.**
- **MDA – Maritime Domain Awareness.**
- **HADR – Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief.**
- **IUU Fishing – Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing.**
- **IFC-IOR – Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region.**
- **UNCLOS – United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.**

UPSC Mains Enrichment:

"India's maritime strategy is evolving from ensuring security in the seas to establishing cooperative governance of the global maritime commons through inclusive, rules-based and trust-driven partnerships."