Coastal Security after 26/11 Attacks - Information Management and Analysis Centre

What is the issue?

- The Navy's Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) will soon become a National Maritime Domain Awareness (NDMA) centre.
- Also, 2020 marks the 12th anniversary of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks; here is a look at coastal security in India after the 26/11 attacks.

How do the security mechanisms work?

- The Indian Navy is responsible for overall maritime security (coastal and offshore).
- It is supposed to be assisted in coastal security by the Coast Guard, State Marine Police and other agencies.
- Post 26/11, the Coast Guard was additionally designated as the authority responsible for coastal security in territorial waters.
- Thrust was given to enhance surveillance in territorial waters by all agencies including the Navy, Coast Guard, Marine Police, and Customs.

What was the need for IMAC?

- The ten Lashkar-e-Toiba terrorists who carried out the 26/11 attacks had entered Mumbai through the sea, using inflatable speedboats.
- In the aftermath of the attacks, several vulnerabilities of coastal security came to the fore.
- The IMAC was created so that another act like the 26/11 attacks do not take place.

What is IMAC?

- To ensure that the Indian Navy, Coast Guard and Marine Police work in an integrated manner, the Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) was set up in 2014.
- Based in Gurgaon, IMAC is the nodal centre for maritime security

information collation and dissemination.

- It is jointly operated by the Navy and Coast Guard.
- It is the cornerstone of the National Command Control Communication and Intelligence (NC3I) network.
    - The NC3I network is for monitoring maritime traffic in India's area of interest.
- IMAC's task is to facilitate exchange of maritime security information among various national stakeholders, and generate a common operational picture.
- Since threats in maritime domain have a transnational character, IMAC feeds data from international sources as well.
- It is important to note that IMAC tracks only non-military or commercial ships, known as white shipping.
- Military ships, or grey hull ships, are tracked by the Directorate of Naval Operations, as this is on a classified network.

What is its scope?

- IMAC focuses on ships passing through the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
    - The IOR, 5500 nautical miles wide by 7500 nm long, includes 35 countries.
    - It is the busiest maritime trade route, with 11,000 to 12,000 ships present in it at any given time.
- Officers at its headquarters can look at all ships that transmit signals to an Automatic Identification System (AIS) when passing through IOR.
- They can look at information including route, destination, nationality and ownership for each vessel.
- And at any given point, IMAC can get data points such as how many Chinese vessels are in the region or how many vessels are headed to a particular port.
    - E.g. Sources suggest a "steady rise" of Chinese research vessels in the IOR over the last few years.
    - The data also show an increase in Chinese fishing vessels in the high seas in IOR, from approximately 300 four years ago to around 450 now.
- IMAC can also check if a vessel has changed its identity, or if it has been involved in law-enforcement issues in other countries.
- IMAC has linkages with a number of national and international organisations, from which it collates data, and analyses patterns.
- It also alerts relevant authorities if anything is found suspicious.
- The following are some of the sources for data for IMAC:

i. The Vessel and Air Traffic Management System under the Petroleum Ministry.

ii. The National Automatic Identification System (AIS), which has 87 stations.
iii. The Long-Range Identification and Trading Information from 174 countries, which comes from the Directorate General of Shipping.
iv. Space-based AIS that provide information on offshore and deep sea vessels, etc.
v. The Indian Ports Authority, information from which has been integrated recently.

- These data are then analysed with various tools that create a comprehensive picture for each vessel.

What are the shortfalls to be addressed?

- When a vessel does not transmit any information about itself through the AIS, it is known as a dark ship.
- There are limited options to track them.
- After 26/11, it was critical for India to have a robust tracking system for all fishing vessels.
- However, while some big vessels may choose to not transmit on AIS, many of India's smaller shipping vessels have no transponders.
    - Of the 2.9 lakh fishing vessels in India, around 60% are smaller than 20 m, most of them without transponders.
- ISRO has been trying to develop a solution for fishing vessel tracking over the last one decade.
- These gaps are exploited by subversive elements.
- Certainly fishermen's boat integration with IMAC will guard coastal frontiers better.

Source: The Indian Express

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