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Prioritizing the Bay of Bengal Region

Why in news?

The launch of the Centre for Bay of Bengal Studies (CBS) at Nalanda University has demonstrated India's commitment to advancing constructive agendas in the Bay.

How significant is Bay of Bengal to India?

- **Commercial hub**- The Bay has long been a major commerce hub for the Indian Ocean.
- **Linking east and west**- It created a conduit between the East and the West in terms for trade and culture.
- **Security**- The key sea lanes of communication in this area are lifelines for global economic security and are crucial to the energy security that powers the economies of many countries in the region.
- **Regional cooperation**- The Bay also provides an opportunity for greater regional cooperation in the environmentally friendly exploration of marine and energy resources.
- **Biodiversity**- The Bay has a biodiverse marine environment and is home to many rare and endangered marine species and mangroves.
- **Geopolitics**- An Indo-Pacific orientation and the realignment of global economic and military power towards Asia have had a considerable impact on the Bay region.



What are the issues at the bay?

- **Environmental issues**- Species extinction has become an issue due to careless exploitation of the maritime environment.
- Problems such as population growth, altered land use, excessive resource exploitation, salinisation, sea level rise, and climate change are straining the Bay's environment.
- Discharge from feeder ships, shipping collisions, oil spills, industrial waste, pollution, and accumulation of plastic litter has resulted in the formation of a dead zone.
- The mangrove trees that protect the shore from the fury of nature are under threat.
- **Expansion of power**- The region's maritime environment has changed as a result of major powers expanding their economic and geopolitical influence.
- **Security concerns**- Non-traditional dangers including terrorism have become more prevalent.

Dead zones are low-oxygen, or hypoxic areas in the world's oceans and lakes and most organisms do not survive in these areas.

What potential does CBS hold?

- **Generation of opportunities**- The Centre for Bay of Bengal Studies will offer collaborations in geo-economics, geopolitics, ecology, trade, connectivity, maritime security, culture and blue economy.
- **Sustainable growth for all**- It has the potential to strengthen India's framework for maritime engagement in order to advance sustainable economic growth for all.
- **Promotion of Partnership**- It promotes the nautical neighbours to partner and cooperate since the maritime domain is interrelated and interdependent in nature.
- **Interdisciplinary research centre**- It will serve as a unique interdisciplinary research centre devoted to Bay-focused teaching, research, and capacity building.
- Scholars from many countries and academic streams are already participating in CBS's first certificate programme on the Bay.

What lies ahead?

- There are few concerns that need immediate attention
 - Expanding cooperation in maritime safety and security
 - Enhancing cooperation on maritime connectivity
 - The ease of maritime transit
 - Boosting investment possibilities in maritime connectivity
- Littoral governments need to support and promote skill-building, research, and training.
- Countries in the region will need to mobilise incentives and investments and manage oceanic affairs more effectively.

References

1. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/rediscovering-the-bay-of-bengal/article65946257.ece>
2. https://www.cs.mcgill.ca/~rwest/wikispeedia/wpcd/wp/b/Bay_of_Bengal.htm
3. <https://www.worldatlas.com/bays/bay-of-bengal.html>

Quick facts

Bay of Bengal

- A bay is defined as a coastal water body that connects to the main water body, such as a lake, ocean, or a larger bay.
- **Uniqueness**- World's largest bay
- **Location**- Northeastern part of the Indian Ocean
- **Formation**- Through plate tectonics
- **Climate**- Monsoon climate
- **Major rivers flowing into Bay of Bengal**- Ganges River, Meghna River, Brahmaputra River, Ayeyarwady River

- **Protected areas**- Bhitarkanika National Park (mangroves), Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary (sea turtles), Teknaf Game Reserve (wild elephants and birds) and Sundarbans National Park (world's largest mangrove forest)
- **Major ports**- Chittagong, Mongla, Chennai, Vishakhapatnam, Kolkata
- **Islands**- Andaman, Nicobar and Mergui groups, Cheduba islands
- **Beaches**- Cox's Bazar (Longest beach) , Marina Beach, Bakkhali, Digba, Chandipur, Puri, Waltair



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