



Partners in Blue Pacific

For Prelims: Partners in the Blue Pacific, G7, Blue Water Navy, Exclusive Economic Zones, Solomon Island, Belt and Road Initiative

For Mains: Pacific Islands Countries, Significance of the Pacific Island Countries, India-PICs Relations, China's Ties in the Pacific Island Countries

Why in News?

Recently, **US and its allies- Australia, New Zealand, Japan and the United Kingdom** — have launched a new initiative called '**Partners in the Blue Pacific**' for "**effective and efficient cooperation**" with the region's small island nations.

- Areas where PBP aims to enhance cooperation include "**climate crisis, connectivity and transportation, maritime security and protection, health, prosperity, and education**".

What is the Partners in the Blue Pacific (PBP) initiative?

- The PBP is a **five-nation "informal mechanism"** to support Pacific islands and to boost diplomatic, economic ties in the region.
- It speaks of enhancing "**prosperity, resilience, and security**" in the Pacific through closer cooperation.
- It means that through the PBP, these countries together and individually will **direct more resources** towards the Pacific Island Countries to **counter China's aggressive outreach**.
- The initiative members will "**elevate Pacific regionalism**", and forge **stronger ties with the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF)**.

What is Pacific Islands Forum (PIF)?

- The Pacific Islands Forum is the region's premier political and economic policy organization.
- Founded in 1971, it comprises **18 members:** Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

What is the Significance of the Pacific Region?

- **Largest Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs):**
 - The islands are divided on the basis of physical and human geography into three distinct parts- **Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia**.
 - Despite their small land area, the islands are spread out over a wide swath of the Pacific Ocean.

- As a result, though they are some of the smallest and least populated states, they have some of the **largest [Exclusive Economic Zones \(EEZs\)](#) in the world.**
- **Economic Potential:**
 - Large EEZs have a great deal of economic potential since they can be used to exploit the wealth of fisheries, energy, minerals, and other marine resources present there.
 - Hence, they prefer to be identified as Big Ocean States, rather than Small Island States.
 - In fact, **Kiribati and FSM, both PICs, have EEZs larger than that of India.**
- **Role in Major Power Rivalry:**
 - The major powers of the colonial era competed with each other to gain control over these strategic territories.
 - The Pacific islands also acted as one of the major theatres of conflict during the **[Second World War](#)**- between imperial **Japan and the US.**
- **Potential Vote Bank:**
 - The Pacific Island Countries (PICs), bound together by shared economic and security concerns, account for as many votes in the **[United Nations](#)**, and act as a **potential vote bank for major powers to mobilise international opinion.**
- **Strategic Importance:**
 - In its 2019 strategy report, the **US Department of Defence** called the Indo-Pacific the **“single most consequential region for America’s future”.**
 - Spanning a vast stretch of the globe from the west coast of the United States to the western shores of India, the region is **home to the world’s most populous state (China), most populous democracy (India), and largest Muslim-majority state (Indonesia)**, and includes over half of the earth’s population.
 - Among the **10 largest standing armies in the world**, 7 reside in the Indo-Pacific; and 6 countries in the region possess nuclear weapons.
 - **Nine of the world’s 10 busiest seaports** are in this region, and **60% of global maritime trade transits through Asia**, with one-third of global shipping passing through the **[South China Sea](#)** alone.

How is China trying to transform its ties in the Pacific?

- As China signed a **security pact with [Solomon Islands](#)**, the deal flagged serious concerns about the **Chinese military getting a base in the southern Pacific**, close to the US island territory of Guam, and right next to Australia and New Zealand.
- China’s quest to dominate crucial shipping lanes pushed **10 Pacific nations** to endorse a game-changing agreement called the **“Common Development Vision”.**
 - Common Development Vision is a comprehensive strategic partnership featuring mutual respect and common development, **to build a closer China-Pacific Island Countries community with a shared future.**
 - The vision is to follow cooperative and sustainable security measures and promote regional peace - strengthening dialogue and cooperation in governance and **[cybersecurity](#).**
- **China and the US are among 21 PIF dialogue partners**, but this year the regional forum had decided **not to engage with the dialogue partners in-person during the [Fiji meet](#).**
- Apart from the vast marine richness of the PICs, the **[Taiwan](#) factor plays a major role in China’s Pacific calculus.**
 - China, which considers Taiwan to be a breakaway territory, is **preparing for what seems like an inevitable military invasion.**
- The PICs are located geostrategically in what is referred to by China as its ‘**Far Seas**’, the control of which will make China an effective **Blue Water capable Navy, an essential** prerequisite for becoming a superpower.
 - A **Blue Water Navy** is one that has the capacity to **project itself over a much bigger maritime area than its maritime borders.**

What is being done by the US and its allies to counter China?

- Before launching the PBP, the US and its partners started the **[Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity \(IPEF\)](#)**, a **trade-boosting play** in the region with **13 nations-**
 - Australia, Brunei, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, Fiji and Vietnam.

- G7 announced a plan- **Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) to rival China's [Belt and Road Initiative](#) by promising to raise 600 billion dollars** to fund development projects in low and middle-income countries.

What are the Highlights of the India-PICs Relations?

▪ About:

- India's interaction with the PICs is still largely driven by the presence of sizable Indian Diaspora in the region.
- Nearly **40% of Fiji's population is of Indian origin and about 3000 Indians live in Papua New Guinea at present.**
- In terms of institutional engagements, India participates in the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) as one of the key dialogue partners of the Forum.
- The most important development in facilitating India's interaction with the PICs in recent years has been the formation of an action-oriented **Forum for India and Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC).**
 - FIPIC, a multinational grouping, was launched in 2014.

▪ Areas of Cooperation:

◦ [Blue Economy](#):

- The PICs with their resource-rich EEZs can be attractive sources of natural resources like Liquefied natural gas (LNG) and hydrocarbons to fuel India's growing economy and can also provide new markets.
- India can engage with these countries particularly, given its own emphasis on the idea of 'Blue Economy'.

◦ [Climate Change and Sustainable Development](#):

- The geography of these island countries makes them vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate challenges.
- The increasing soil salinity due to the rising sea level threatens the low-lying island states, also giving rise to the problem of displacement.
- Therefore, climate change and sustainable development are crucial areas of concern where a closer partnership can be developed for effective and concrete solutions.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action', often seen in the news, is: (2015)

- (a) a strategy to tackle regional terrorism, an outcome of a meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
- (b) a plan of action for sustainable economic growth in the Asia-Pacific Region, an outcome of the deliberations of the Asia-Pacific Economic Forum
- (c) an agenda for women's empowerment, an outcome of a World Conference convened by the United Nations
- (d) a strategy to combat wildlife trafficking, a declaration of the East Asia Summit

Ans: (c)

- The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is a global commitment to achieve equality, development and peace for women worldwide. It was adopted in September, 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing. It builds upon consensus and progress made at earlier UN Conferences, particularly the Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985.
- The Platform for Action is an agenda for women's empowerment. It aims at accelerating the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and at removing all the obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making.]
- Therefore, option (c) is the correct answer

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