

## General Studies-2; Topic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

### Geopolitical Significance of Horn of Africa to India

#### 1) Introduction

- That President Ram Nath Kovind's first visit abroad is to Djibouti and Ethiopia suggests geopolitical significance of Horn of Africa to India
- The four states constituting the Horn — Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti — along with Yemen across the Red Sea have been described as one of the world's pivotal regions.
- The President's visit laid the foundations for a comprehensive engagement with Djibouti and the Horn of Africa.

#### 2) Significance

- Africa is critical to India's security, especially the Horn of Africa region, because of its proximity with India.
- Africa and Indian Ocean Region are central to the foreign policy of India.
- India has traditionally engaged with African nations through its soft power initiatives
- In 2008, India organized the first India-Africa Forum Summit with the aim of recasting its ties with the continent.
- New Delhi has followed up its initiative with two more such summits—in 2011 in Addis Ababa and in New Delhi in 2015.
- In the last three years, there have been 16 visits to Africa by the Indian President, vice-president and the Prime Minister
- India is amongst the top trade, investment and development partner of Ethiopia.
- Ethiopia continues to be the largest recipient of India's concessional Lines of Credit in Africa
- Djibouti supported during Operation Rahat for evacuating Indians from war-torn Yemen in 2015.

#### 3) Opportunities

- Djibouti's location at the confluence of the Red Sea with the Indian Ocean and the crossroads connecting Africa, the Middle East and Asia have made it a very attractive piece of geopolitical real estate.
- At the Africa summit in Delhi during 2015, most participating leaders wanted an expansion of security and defence cooperation with India.
- China's strategic advances in the Horn have helped put Djibouti back on India's political radar.
- India's role in maintaining peace and stability in the Horn of Africa region so as to eradicate the menace of terrorism.
- Greater role for India in Djibouti's economic development, with a focus on small and medium scale industries.
- International Solar Alliance (ISA) acts as a common platform to work closely to deepen bilateral and regional cooperation
- The declining US interest in Africa presented New Delhi an opportunity to deepen its engagement with the continent even more.

#### 4) China's Influence in the Region

- Beijing's infrastructure development in the Horn preceded the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative

- One of the more visible infrastructure projects in the region has been the 750 km-long rail link between landlocked Ethiopia and Djibouti.
- China's geopolitical interest in the Horn has come into focus with the deployment of naval units to combat piracy in the Gulf of Aden.
- China is raising its strategic profile in the region.
- Beijing has secured the rights to a base in Djibouti that can host up to 10,000 soldiers until 2026.
- Djibouti could become another of China's "string of pearls" of military alliances and assets ringing India, including Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka.

### 5) **Way Forward**

- India does not have an embassy in Djibouti. Now it's time to re-engage the region strategically.
- Defence diplomacy is an important imperative for India all across the Indian Ocean littoral.
- Need to engage both India and Djibouti on regional and international issues of mutual concern.
- Join hands with the international community in eradicating the menace of terrorism
- Work closely to intensify the cooperation in the United Nations and other multilateral fora in order to address current global challenges
- There is a need for early ratification of Djibouti's membership of the ISA to tap its solar energy potential.
- Need for promoting greater cultural exchanges.

