International Relations · GS - II

India has emphasised that any Code of Conduct for the South China Sea must uphold UNCLOS and protect the rights of non-claimant states. Examine the significance of a rules-based maritime order for peace, stability and India's interests in the Indo-Pacific.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
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MARKS	WORD LIMIT
10	~150 words

Answer Hint

UNCLOS and freedom of navigation, South China Sea as a global trade route, rights of non-claimant states, ASEAN-China negotiations, China's maritime assertiveness, India's Act East Policy, Indo-Pacific cooperation, peaceful dispute resolution.

Model Answer

Introduction

The South China Sea is a strategically important maritime region through which a substantial share of global trade and energy supplies passes. Competing territorial claims have made its stability a major international concern.

Significance of a Rules-Based Maritime Order

- **International law:** UNCLOS provides the legal framework for maritime zones, navigation rights and peaceful dispute settlement.
- **Global commerce:** Open sea lanes ensure uninterrupted movement of goods, energy and essential supplies.

- **Rights of non-claimants:** Countries without territorial claims, including India, retain legitimate navigation and commercial interests.
- **Regional stability:** A rules-based Code of Conduct can reduce coercion, miscalculation and unilateral actions.
- **India's interests:** Peaceful maritime access supports India's trade, energy security, Act East Policy and Indo-Pacific partnerships.

Challenges

Divergent territorial claims, militarisation, strategic rivalry and difficulties in achieving consensus undermine effective implementation.

Conclusion

India should support an inclusive, legally consistent and enforceable Code of Conduct that promotes freedom of navigation, peaceful dispute resolution and respect for UNCLOS.

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