



Collaboration of India, Sri Lanka and Maldives on Security

Why in News

Recently in a **Deputy National Security Adviser-level meeting hosted by Sri Lanka, India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives** have agreed to work on “four pillars” of security cooperation.

- The four areas covers **marine security**, [human trafficking](#), [counter-terrorism](#), and [cyber security](#).
- The **meeting** which was held **under the Colombo Security Conclave**, saw **Bangladesh, Seychelles and Mauritius** participating in the **role of observers**.

Key Points

▪ Background:

- Soon after the NSA (National Security Adviser) Trilateral meeting on Maritime Security in November 2020 in Colombo, this **grouping was renamed as 'Colombo Security Conclave'**. A secretariat has also been established in the capital city of Sri Lanka (Colombo).
- This **Trilateral framework was established back in 2011**.
- The **aim of the establishment of the Conclave** was to forge closer cooperation on maritime and security matters among the three Indian Ocean countries.
- The initiative, **grounded in military and security collaboration**, assumes significance in the region, in the wake of the current geostrategic dynamic that India shares with Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

▪ Current Geostrategic Dynamic:

- **Sri Lanka:** Earlier this year, **India aired security concerns over [China being awarded development projects](#)** in an island off Sri Lanka's northern province, close to India's southern border.
- The **Maldives's engagement** with members of the **India-United States-Japan-Australia grouping**, known as the '**Quad**', has been growing over the last year, especially in the area of defence cooperation.

▪ Highlights of the Latest Meeting:

- The **aim** of the Meeting was **to establish a maritime security mechanism for Indian Ocean Region (IOR)** including the Bay of Bengal **amid China's growing presence in the area**.
- With the six countries attending the meeting, the **focus areas were expanded and now it covers** weapons and human trafficking, countering terrorism and violent extremism, protection of maritime environment, capacity building, transnational crimes including narcotics, and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), etc.
- More cooperation through **joint exercises of the navies and coast guards** to further strengthen maritime safety and security in IOR.
- As has been reported earlier, there have been **pollution accidents in the IOR**. MV Xpress Pearl, MT New Diamond and MV Wakashio had accidents in the region and this impacted the marine environment. The members discussed ways of combating the pollution in the waters.

- Later this year, the **three observer countries** have been invited to be **full members at the next NSA level meeting**. This meeting will take place in Maldives.
- **Significance:**
 - The **widening of thematic areas** of cooperation and **expansion of membership** to Bangladesh, Mauritius and Seychelles **indicate growing convergence among the Indian Ocean Region countries** to work together in a common platform and to deepen the spheres of engagement under a regional framework.
 - The **coming together of the 6 Indian Ocean region countries** in India's immediate neighbourhood on a common maritime and security platform is significant in a wider global context as well.
 - It **highlights India's desire to play a leading security role in the neighbourhood**.
- **Concerns:**
 - The progress of the NSA-level trilateral meeting was affected when Delhi's ties with Male deteriorated under Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen.
 - **Subregional cooperation cannot be insulated from bilateral political relations** and, hence, maintaining good bilateral relations with individual countries and responding to the growing aspirations of smaller neighbours would be crucial.
 - **Most of the smaller neighbours** are more **comfortable cooperating in non-traditional security than entering into hard military cooperation** with India at the subregional level.

Way Forward

- A **subregional approach** to building security cooperation has been gaining salience in **India's neighbourhood policy** in recent years. The revival of the NSA-level trilateral India-Sri Lanka-Maldives dialogue on maritime security cooperation underscores this policy approach.
- **Drawing a clear boundary of the subregion** will continue to remain a challenge as cooperation will not always be driven by the proximity factor but also by the nature of the issue itself. Having said that, some clarity on the boundary issue may help in better framing the objectives of subregional security cooperation and avoid overlapping of membership or duplication of activities.

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