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Colombo Security Conclave

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Why in news?

The Member States of the **Colombo Security Conclave (CSC)** signed the Charter and the **MoU for establishment of the CSC Secretariat in Colombo**

- **The Colombo Security Conclave (CSC)** brings together **National Security Advisors (NSA)** and **Deputy NSAs** from **India, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Mauritius**.
- **Bangladesh joined as the fifth Member** State of the CSC in July

Colombo Security Conclave

- The Colombo Security Conclave was founded as a *trilateral security framework between India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives in 2011*.
- It has since *expanded to include Mauritius and Bangladesh as members*, and the *Seychelles as an observer*
- CSC deals with **maritime security, counter-terrorism and cybersecurity** with India bringing to the fore its own strategic concerns in the Indian Ocean.
- The CSC's **core objective is to promote regional security by addressing transnational threats** and challenges of common concern to the Member States.

Cooperation under the CSC focuses on five pillars.

They are:

- i) Maritime safety and security.**
- ii) Countering terrorism and radicalisation.**
- iii) Combating trafficking and transnational organised crime.**
- iv) Cyber security and protection of critical infrastructure and technology.**
- v) Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.**

Changing Dynamics and India's Strategic Vision

- The CSC's trajectory **underscores the evolving dynamics of the Indian Ocean**.
- India's initiative to expand the CSC to include Mauritius, Seychelles, and Bangladesh signifies its evolving strategic vision in the region.

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- As a traditional regional power, **India views the CSC as an opportunity to strengthen its leadership and contribute significantly to the region's security architecture.**

Navigating the China Factor:

- China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean, evident through initiatives like the **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), String of pearls** and **maritime infrastructure projects**, has contributed to the CSC's resurgence.
- **Beijing's investments, naval capabilities, and strategic interests in the region are perceived by India as an attempt to curb its influence and secure critical sea lines.**
- Despite concerns, India acknowledges that several regional nations don't view China as a direct threat, leading the CSC to focus on multiple pillars of cooperation to address shared challenges like maritime security, counterterrorism, cyber threats, and humanitarian aid.

Operationalizing the CSC's Agenda:

- The CSC has made tangible progress in enhancing regional security by investigating terror financing, addressing narcotics trafficking, combating cybercrime, and promoting maritime safety.
- The institution has organized conferences on coastal security and engaged in collaborations on counter-terrorism, law enforcement, and cybersecurity.
- However, the CSC remains susceptible to domestic political shifts within member nations, as evident from the Maldives' absence, indicating the complex interplay of national interests, nationalism, and international alignments within these democracies.

Challenges and the Way Forward

- The CSC faces challenges concerning its **expansion and coordination with existing multilateral groups in the Indian Ocean.**
- It also aims to **insulate itself from domestic political changes**, highlighting the need for better institutionalization within participant countries.
- Additionally, to ensure a more concentrated focus on maritime concerns within the CSC, India might consider establishing bilateral maritime security dialogues with each CSC member country.

Way forward:

The CSC stands as a **pivotal forum promoting enhanced security cooperation** in the Indian Ocean region.

- While it has made strides in addressing diverse security challenges, **overcoming challenges related to its structure and coordination with other regional bodies will be crucial** for its sustained effectiveness and success.