Colombo Security Conclave (CSC)

Why in news?

Recently, India's National Security Adviser (NSA), took part in the 6th NSA meeting of the Colombo Security Conclave (CSC) which agreed upon a road map for the year 2024.

What is Colombo Security Conclave?

- It is a ***regional security grouping*** initially known as the Trilateral for Maritime Security Cooperation.
- **Established in** – ***2011***
- **Aim** – To promote a safe, secure, and stable Indian Ocean, with India playing a leadership role.
- **Membership** – ***4***
  - ***India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives*** were part of trilateral maritime security collaboration, while ***Mauritius*** joined at 5th meeting of grouping in Male in 2022.
- **Observer status** – ***Bangladesh and Seychelles***, now they have received invitations to become active participants in the group.

The CSC countries are all members of the 2 region-wide Indian Ocean groupings, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS).

- **5 pillars**
  - Maritime safety and security
  - Countering terrorism and radicalisation
  - Combating trafficking and transnational organised crime
  - Cyber-security and protection of critical infrastructure
  - Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief
- **Permanent secretariat** – ***In Colombo***, established in 2021 to coordinate all activities and implement decisions made at the National Security Advisor (NSA) level.
- **Meeting** – It happens at the level of NSA and deputy NSA.
- **Security-focused exercises** - In 2021, India, Sri Lanka, and Maldives conducted ***Exercise Dosti XV*** in Maldives and they subsequently conducted their 1st joint exercise in the Arabian Sea named as ***Table Top Exercise (TTX).***
- **Significance** – Since 2021, it has investigated terrorism and terror financing, narcotics trafficking, cybercrime and security, marine pollution, maritime law, and coastal security.
- **Conducting conferences** - In 2022, for the 1st time, the organisation held a
  - Conference of oceanographers and hydrographers

    - Conference on coastal security and the next iterations of these conferences are scheduled for 2024.
- **Joint working groups** – It is to focus on terrorism, cyber-security, humanitarian aid and disaster relief (HADR), trafficking and transnational organised crimes.
- **Collaborating on capacity-building** - In sectors such as counter-terrorism, police, law enforcement, and cyber-security.

What is the changing dynamics of CSC?

- **Disruption** – It started in 2011 but it came to a standstill after 2014 due to rising *tensions between India and the Maldives* which led to the ***suspension of meetings between 2014 and 2020***.
- **Revival** – ***In 2020***, India pushed for the revival and thus it was ***rebranded as Colombo Security Conclave***.
- India also expressed interest in *expanding the CSC to the Seychelles and Bangladesh* who are currently observer nations.
- **Reason for revival** – It is due to *increasing importance of Indian Ocean* in an evolving multipolar world today, with extra-regional powers competing to make inroads in the region.
- It is partially linked to the *increased Chinese presence in Indian Ocean* along with its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects.
    - China has established a base in Djibouti and controls Sri Lanka's Hambantota port.
- **Space for India's leadership** – It offers India an opportunity to institutionalise its role, shape *the regional security architecture*, and better address the existing and emerging threats.
- India plays as the *1st responder in the IOR*, be it to avert coups or to offer humanitarian and economic assistance during COVID-19 and multi-faceted crises.

What are the challenges faced by CSC?

- **Domestic politics** – It remains vulnerable to domestic political changes in member-states, as evidenced by the *Maldives' absence from the recent meeting*.
- **Chinese influence** – All member-states being democracies may continue to play *nationalist and pro-China cards* for domestic and external benefits as the Indo-Pacific region grows in prominence.
- **Emerging Sub-regionalism** – The *convergence of 6 Indian Ocean region countries* within the CSC signifies the emergence of sub-regionalism on a unified maritime and security platform.

What lies ahead?

- Uphold a *common strategic vision* emphasizing the importance of not being hindered by the escalating Chinese influence in the region.
- *Avert points of contention with neighbouring countries* and foster collaboration in the region.

References

1. The Hindu | Evolving role of CSC
2. Hindustan Times | CSC roadmap for IOR