

3. Colombo Security Conclave- International Relation

7th Colombo Security Conclave NSAs Meeting Begins in New Delhi. India hosted the 7th Colombo Security Conclave (CSC) summit, solidifying its role as a "Net Security Provider" by inducting Seychelles as a full member and engaging Malaysia. The summit emphasized institutionalizing cooperation on maritime security and non-traditional threats to create a cohesive security architecture in the Indian Ocean Region, distinct from China's influence.

7th Colombo Security Conclave (CSC) Summit

Event- 7th National Security Advisor-level summit.

Host- India (Chaired by National Security Adviser Ajit Doval).

Purpose- To strengthen cooperative mechanisms for security and stability in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

Participation Details-

Existing Member States- India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, Bangladesh.

New Full Member- Seychelles (previously an Observer, formally joined as a full member at this summit).

Observer/Guest- Malaysia participated as a Guest State (signaling potential future engagement).

Key Outcomes of the 7th Summit-

Expansion of Membership- Seychelles' formal accession signals a stronger regional commitment to the platform.

Deepened Maritime Engagement- India strengthened cooperation with maritime neighbors to counter rising geopolitical competition (specifically involving China).

Security Focus- A renewed emphasis was placed on maritime security as a prerequisite for stability in the IOR.

Future Prospects- Malaysia's participation indicates a possible broadening of the group's scope into the wider Indo-Pacific.

About Colombo Security Conclave (CSC)

Definition- A regional security cooperation platform focused on enhancing maritime and transnational security among Indian Ocean Region (IOR) countries.

Secretariat- Located in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Origin and Evolutionary Timeline

2011 (Establishment)- Launched as a trilateral maritime security mechanism between India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives.

2020 (Revival & Expansion)- Revitalized with Mauritius joining as a full member. Bangladesh and Seychelles were inducted as Observers.

2024 (Strategic Depth)- Bangladesh became a full member. Founding Documents were signed in August 2024 in Sri Lanka, providing a formal institutional and operational structure.

2025 (Current Status)- Seychelles transitioned to full membership. Malaysia engaged as a Guest State.

Objectives and Core Mandate

Primary Objectives

Enhanced Cooperation- Strengthen collaboration on maritime security, counterterrorism, and cybersecurity across littoral states.

Intelligence Sharing- Promote real-time information exchange and joint threat assessments.

Capacity Building- Conduct joint exercises, specialized training, and build institutional frameworks for long-term preparedness.

The Five Core Pillars of Cooperation (+1)- The mandate revolves around five core pillars and one distinct environmental area-

1. Maritime Safety & Security
2. Countering Terrorism & Radicalisation
3. Combating Trafficking & Transnational Crime
4. Cyber Security & Critical Infrastructure Protection

5. Humanitarian Assistance & Disaster Relief (HADR)
6. Marine Pollution Response (Environmental Security)

Key Achievements of the CSC

Institutional Strengthening– Appointment of the first CSC Secretary-General (India-led). Progress toward establishing a dedicated CSC Training Academy.

Operational Enhancement– Regular table-top exercises and simulation drills. Training provided to Mauritius Coast Guard/Police. Deployment of Indian hydrographers to member states.

Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)– Deep integration with the Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region (IFC–IOR) for real-time surveillance and intelligence.

Blue Economy– Establishment of the Virtual Centre of Excellence on Blue Economy (2025) to support sustainable marine governance.

Regional Cohesion– The accession of Seychelles and interest from Malaysia reflect growing trust in the platform. Issue-specific Working Groups ensure continuous policy coordination.

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) Context



Geographical Extent– Spans from the East African coast to Western Australia. Includes the Arab Gulf, South Asia, East Asia, and Southern Ocean Islands. Contains critical choke points– Straits of Malacca, Hormuz, Bab el Mandeb, Ombai, and Wetar Straits.

Global Significance

Size– Third-largest Ocean basin.

Population– Home to nearly one-third of the world's population.

Energy– Over two-thirds of global oil shipments pass through these waters.

India's Stake– 90% of India's trade by volume and almost all oil imports transit here. India possesses a 2.4 million sq. km Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

India's Strategic Approach in the IOR

Policy Framework– Neighbourhood First Policy. SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region).

MAHASAGAR Doctrine (March 2025)– "Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions"—an expansion of SAGAR into a broader regional vision.

Role as Net Security Provider– Conducts counter-piracy patrols and fights IUU (Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated) fishing. Executes joint EEZ surveillance.

Infrastructure Strategy

Sagarmala 2.0– Upgrading domestic port connectivity.

Foreign Port Development– Investments in Chabahar (Iran), Sri Lanka, Mauritius, and Seychelles.

First Responder in Crises

Operation Sagar Bandhu (Late 2025)– Relief for floods/landslides in Sri Lanka.

Operation Sadbhav– Aid for Myanmar, Laos, and Vietnam post-Typhoon Yagi.

Significance of CSC for the Region

Alternative to SAARC– Unlike SAARC (stalled by India-Pakistan tensions), CSC brings together willing coastal nations, enabling faster decision-making.

Strengthens "First Responder" Role– Enhances India's image as a trusted partner through equipment supply (vessels, aircraft) and diplomatic support.

Counterbalancing China– Acts as a quiet counterbalance to China's "String of Pearls" strategy. Reduces member states' dependence on Chinese military facilities (e.g., Hambantota, Djibouti).

Addressing Non-Traditional Threats– Focuses on issues vital to island nations– climate disasters, marine pollution, and drug trafficking.

Creating an "Inner Ring"– Forms a tight, operational group linked to India's immediate coastline, distinct from the broader Quad.

Rule-Making Forum– Promotes collective norms (UNCLOS, freedom of navigation) to prevent outside powers from dictating regional rules.

Challenges Facing the CSC

Divergent Threat Perceptions– While India views China as a strategic challenge, other members often rely on Chinese economic loans and infrastructure, making alignment difficult.

Structural Weaknesses– Functions largely at the NSA level without Ministerial backing. Lacks a pooled budget and joint operational mechanisms (like coordinated patrols).

Domestic Political Volatility– Regime changes can disrupt continuity (e.g., "India Out" campaigns in Maldives or shifts in Bangladesh).

Coordination Issues– Lack of synergy between broader groups like IORA and IONS hinders effectiveness.

Fragmentation– Overlaps with BIMSTEC, IORA, and IPOI can dilute focus.

Comparative Analysis– CSC vs. Other Groupings

Feature	Colombo Security Conclave (CSC)	Quad	Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)	Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)	Milan Exercise
Geographic Scope	Immediate Indian Ocean littorals (Sub-regional)	Wider Indo-Pacific	Broad Indian Ocean Region (23 members)	36 Littoral State Navies	Multinational (Varies)
Core Focus	Non-traditional security (HADR, Cyber, Trafficking)	Strategic balance, Tech, Supply chains	Economic cooperation, Trade, Sustainability	Professional naval dialogue	Interoperability & Naval diplomacy
Hard Power Component	Low (Table-top exercises)	High (Malabar exercises)	None (Civilian platform)	None (Dialogue forum)	High (Major naval maneuvers)
India's Role	Unambiguous Leader & Agenda-Setter	First among Equals (Shared with US, Japan, Aus)	Founding Member (Not security-focused)	Founder (Non-dominant)	Host Nation

Way Forward

Institutional Upgrade– Elevate meetings to the Foreign Minister level for stronger political ownership.

Funding– Create a dedicated CSC Security Cooperation Fund for joint projects and MDA infrastructure.

Operational Task Forces- Form permanent task forces for each of the security pillars to ensure follow-through.

Collaborative Operations- Move from table-top drills to real-world joint naval patrols and anti-IUU missions.

Technology Integration- Use AI and satellite surveillance via the IFC-IOR for better situational awareness.

Strategic Sensitivity- Focus on non-traditional threats to maintain cohesion while offering transparent alternatives to Chinese debt-trap models.

Phased Expansion- Allow countries like Thailand to join as Observers first to protect institutional stability.

Conclusion

The Colombo Security Conclave uniquely positions India as the undisputed security anchor of its neighborhood. It enables faster coordination and stronger trust, serving as an effective counterbalance to China and making the CSC India's most reliable platform for shaping Indian Ocean security.

Source- <https://www.newsonair.gov.in/7th-colombo-security-conclave-nsas-meeting-begins-in-new-delhi/>

