



COLOMBO SECURITY CONCLAVE - GS II AND III MAINS

Q. The CSC faces vulnerability to domestic political changes in its member countries. Discuss the challenges faced by the member countries in achieving the ideals of the conclave in the backdrop of present geo-political context. (10 marks, 150 words)

News: *The evolving role of the Colombo Security Conclave*

What's in the news?

- In early December, India's National Security Adviser (NSA), Ajit Doval, took part in the sixth NSA meeting of the Colombo Security Conclave (CSC).
- The meeting reviewed the developments and progress made by the CSC in the last year and agreed upon a road map for the year 2024 to promote a safe, secure and stable Indian Ocean.

Key takeaways:

- All the members of the CSC, which are democracies, will continue to play their cards based on domestic and external benefits.

Colombo Security Conclave:

- The Colombo Security Conclave is a **regional security grouping**.
- It was initially formed in **2011** as a trilateral Indian Ocean maritime security grouping of **India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives**.
- It was revived again in 2021. The Colombo Security Conclave has since expanded both its membership as well as scope.
- Colombo Security Conclave envisages sharing intelligence and collaborating on the security aspects of marine security, human trafficking, counter-terrorism and cyber security.
- The fifth edition saw the induction of **Mauritius as a new member** and the scope of the conclave was expanded to include humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Key areas of cooperation (5 Pillars):

- Maritime Safety and Security
- Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief



- Combating Trafficking and Transnational Organized Crime
- Countering Terrorism and Radicalization
- Cyber Security, Protection of Critical Infrastructure and Technology

Significance:

In light of the current global circumstances, the gathering that focuses on working together for military and security purposes becomes increasingly important in the region.

1. Maritime Security:

- The conclave conducts “CSC Focused Operation” which plays a key role in keeping the Indian Ocean safe and secure for commercial shipping, international trade and conduct of legitimate maritime activities.

2. Exchange of Information:

- It further improves the existing harmony in the region through timely exchange of information.

3. Cooperation between Agencies:

- The conclave will aid in greater understanding and interoperability between the security agencies.

4. Cybersecurity:

- The grouping helps in addressing key challenges such as Deep Web, Dark Net, Digital Forensics, Cyber Threat intelligence and Defensive Operations in Cyber Domain.

5. Tackling Environmental Hazards:

- Recent incidents like that of MV Xpress Pearl, MT New Diamond, and MV Wakashio caused wide-scale marine pollution in the Indian Ocean. The conclave also focuses its attention in this regard.

Challenges:

1. Political Challenge:

- The organisation will be susceptible to changes in domestic politics, such as those in governments.
- CSC, still a young institution, remains vulnerable owing to domestic political shuffle in its member-states. The absence of Maldives from the recent meeting is an example of this vulnerability.



2. India's Dominance:

- Smaller nations in the organisation are concerned of India's dominating position in the organisation.
- They do not want the group to be seen as anti-China.

3. Bilateral Mechanism:

- India presently does not have a separate bilateral maritime security discussion with any of the other five CSC nations to supplement the CSC process.

4. Limited Membership:

- The CSC's limited membership and scope has been its biggest drawback since its inception.
- Regional countries not considering China as a threat weaken the conclave and India's priorities.

5. Chinese Threat:

- China, through its platforms such as the Indian Ocean Region Forum on Development Cooperation aims to counter the prevailing security architecture in the Indian Ocean by marking its presence in the region. Thus, undermining the role and potential of CSC.

WAY FORWARD:

1. Focused Membership and Regular Dialogues:

- As the CSC contemplates expanding its membership, it must ensure it doesn't duplicate the efforts of existing Indian Ocean multilateral groups.
- The effectiveness of the CSC lies in its focused membership and regular dialogues, avoiding redundancy seen in broader regional groupings like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS).

2. Institutionalizing Amid Political Changes:

- The CSC faces vulnerability to domestic political changes in its member countries.
- To overcome this challenge, the CSC should work towards institutionalizing itself within the participant nations, potentially establishing senior official-level working groups to provide stability despite shifts in governments.

3. Enhancing Bilateral Maritime Security Dialogues:

- With the CSC incorporating the India-Sri Lanka-Maldives maritime security dialogue, India lacks dedicated bilateral maritime security dialogues with the other CSC members.
- To maintain a focus on shared maritime concerns within the CSC, India should establish dedicated bilateral maritime security dialogues with each CSC country, complementing the broader multilateral process and fostering more targeted cooperation.