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Colombo Security Conclave — Seychelles Joins, Expanding India's Indian Ocean Architecture

10 February 2026

SUBJECTS COVERED**IR SECURITY & DEFENCE****CURATED & WRITTEN BY****Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator •

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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WHY IN NEWS

Seychelles formally joined the Colombo Security Conclave (CSC) as its sixth member, broadening India's Indian Ocean Region (IOR) security architecture from a trilateral mechanism to a six-nation framework aligned with India's SAGAR vision and the newer MAHASAGAR initiative.

FROM TRILATERAL TO HEXALATERAL — THE CSC'S JOURNEY

The **Colombo Security Conclave** has undergone a significant evolution since its founding. It began in **2011** as a small **trilateral mechanism** involving only India, Sri Lanka, and Maldives — focused on narrow maritime security concerns in the northern Indian Ocean. The initial meetings were modest, primarily coordinating coastguard operations and countering piracy.

The mechanism was effectively dormant for several years before being **revived and restructured in 2020** as the Colombo Security Conclave, with an expanded mandate and secretariat. Mauritius joined in **2021**, Bangladesh in **2022** (as an observer, later full member), and now **Seychelles in February 2026** completes the current six-nation configuration.

The **Permanent Secretariat** is located in **Colombo, Sri Lanka** — a deliberate choice that underlines the inclusive, non-India-centric character of the grouping even as India is clearly its strategic anchor.

THE SIX MEMBERS AND WHY EACH MATTERS

India — The security provider, intelligence sharer, and capacity builder. India's Coast Guard, Navy, and NSA-level engagement drive the Conclave's operational substance.

Sri Lanka — The geographic heart of the Indian Ocean, controlling sea lanes between the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. Sri Lanka's partnership is critical to countering Chinese port investments (Hambantota) with active security cooperation.

Maldives — Sits astride critical sea lanes between India and Southeast Asia. Maldivian politics have oscillated between India-aligned and China-aligned governments; CSC membership creates institutional anchors that survive political transitions.

Mauritius — Commands the southwestern Indian Ocean; its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of **2.3 million sq km** gives it disproportionate maritime importance. Mauritius also has a large Indian-origin diaspora (approx. 70% of population), making it a natural partner.

Bangladesh — Largest new member; its Bay of Bengal coastline (~580 km) and shared eastern maritime border with India make maritime security cooperation essential. Bangladesh's growing shipbuilding capacity also creates defence industrial cooperation potential.

Seychelles — An archipelago of 115 islands in the western Indian Ocean with an EEZ of **1.37 million sq km** — among the largest EEZ-to-land ratios in the world. Seychelles is a critical node for tracking vessel traffic between the African coast, the Gulf, and the Strait of Malacca. India has already built infrastructure on **Assumption Island** in Seychelles (a coast guard facility).

FIVE PILLARS OF CSC COOPERATION

The CSC operates across **five defined pillars**:

Maritime Security — coordinating patrol operations, vessel monitoring, information sharing on non-traditional threats

Counter-Terrorism and Radicalisation — intelligence sharing, law enforcement coordination

Trafficking and Organised Crime — particularly drug trafficking via the Indian Ocean (Afghanistan-Africa route) and human trafficking

Cybersecurity — building national cyber capacities and sharing threat intelligence

HADR (Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief) — coordinating rapid response to cyclones, tsunamis, and other natural disasters that disproportionately impact Indian Ocean island states

THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT — SAGAR AND MAHASAGAR

The CSC sits within a broader framework of India's Indian Ocean diplomacy.

SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) — coined by PM Modi during his 2015 Mauritius visit — articulates India's vision as a **net security provider** in the IOR: building partner capacity, maintaining open sea lanes, and providing disaster response without seeking exclusive strategic spheres.

MAHASAGAR — India's newer initiative — goes beyond security to encompass economic connectivity, blue economy cooperation, and sustainable maritime development across the Indian Ocean littoral. It represents an attempt to position India as a development partner (not just a security provider) in competition with China's Maritime Silk Road investments.

The CSC expansion is directly aligned with both frameworks. Each new member adds maritime domain awareness capability, HADR reach, and political anchoring for India's IOR vision.

THE CHINA FACTOR

China's systematic presence in the Indian Ocean — Hambantota port (Sri Lanka), Gwadar (Pakistan), Chittagong investments (Bangladesh), and growing naval presence in Djibouti — creates the strategic context in which the CSC operates. No CSC document names China, but the architecture is explicitly designed to provide a credible regional security alternative to the String of Pearls strategy.

Seychelles' addition is particularly significant. Chinese fishing vessels have long been documented operating in Indian Ocean EEZs — including Seychelles' — and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing is a specific concern for island states. The CSC's maritime domain awareness pillar directly addresses this.

UPSC RELEVANCE

CSC founding year (2011), revival as CSC (2020), 6 members (India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, Bangladesh, Seychelles), Secretariat (Colombo), 5 pillars, SAGAR vision (2015, Mauritius), MAHASAGAR, Hambantota port (Sri Lanka/China), India's Assumption Island facility (Seychelles).

*India's Indian Ocean diplomacy; SAGAR vision; China's String of Pearls vs. India's security architecture; net security provider role; CSC as regional security mechanism. **GS-3:** Maritime security, blue economy, HADR.*

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA
COLOMBO SECURITY CONCLAVE (CSC):

Founded: **2011** (trilateral: India, Sri Lanka, Maldives)

Revived as CSC: **2020**; Secretariat: **Colombo, Sri Lanka**

Current members (6): **India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, Bangladesh, Seychelles**

Member timeline: Mauritius (2021), Bangladesh (2022), Seychelles (2026)

5 cooperation pillars: Maritime security, Counter-terrorism, Trafficking/Crime, Cybersecurity, HADR

MEMBER MARITIME SIGNIFICANCE:

Mauritius EEZ: ~**2.3 million sq km**

Seychelles: 115 islands; EEZ ~**1.37 million sq km**; India built coast guard facility on **Assumption Island**

Bangladesh coastline: ~**580 km** on Bay of Bengal

INDIA'S IOR FRAMEWORK:

SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region): launched **2015**, PM Modi's Mauritius visit

MAHASAGAR: newer initiative — blue economy, connectivity, sustainable maritime development

India's role: Net security provider in the IOR

CHINA'S IOR PRESENCE (CONTEXT):

Hambantota Port (Sri Lanka): 99-year lease to China Merchants Port Holdings (2017)

Gwadar Port (Pakistan): CPEC flagship under Chinese control

Djibouti: China's first overseas military base (2017)

String of Pearls: China's network of ports/facilities encircling India's maritime periphery

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

IOR = Indian Ocean Region; ~65% of world's oil and 50% of gas transits IOR

Non-traditional maritime threats: piracy, IUU fishing, drug trafficking (Afghanistan-Africa), human trafficking

HADR significance: Indian Ocean island states are highly vulnerable to cyclones, tsunamis, sea-level rise

Sources: Drishti IAS, Next IAS

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Bharat Choudhary

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