

INDIA, SRI LANKA AND MALDIVES TO COLLABORATE ON SECURITY

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Sri Lanka

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India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives have agreed to work on “four pillars” of security cooperation, covering areas of marine security, human trafficking, counter-terrorism, and cyber security, in a recent virtual meeting of top security officials of the three countries.

The Deputy National Security Adviser-level meeting was hosted online by Sri Lanka on Wednesday, and chaired by General LHSC Silva, Chief of Defence Staff and Commander of Army of Sri Lanka. Pankaj Saran, Deputy National Security Adviser of India, and Aishath Nooshin Waheed, Secretary, National Security Adviser's Office of the Maldivian President participated.

Intelligence sharing

The discussion comes nine months after National Security Adviser Ajit Doval visited Colombo for deliberations with Secretary to Sri Lanka's Ministry of Defence, Kamal Gunaratne, and Defence Minister of Maldives, Mariya Didi, in which the three countries agreed to expand the scope of intelligence sharing.

Their meeting marked the revival of NSA-level trilateral talks on maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region after a gap of six years.

Following up on that, the Deputy NSA-level meeting this week identified “four pillars” of cooperation in Marine Safety and Security, Terrorism and Radicalisation, Trafficking and Organised Crime, and Cyber security, a press release from the Indian High Commission here said on Friday, adding “specific proposals” for cooperation in each area, including joint exercises and training were discussed.

The ‘Colombo Security Conclave’ among the three neighbouring countries seeks to “further promote” maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region, and was initiated by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in 2011, when he was Secretary to the Ministry of Defence, according to a media release from the Sri Lankan Army.

The initiative, grounded in military and security collaboration, assumes significance in the region, in the wake of the current geostrategic dynamic that India shares with Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Earlier this year, India aired security concerns over China being awarded development projects in an island off Sri Lanka's northern province, close to India's southern border.

Engagement with Quad

On the other hand, the Maldives's engagement with members of the India-United States-Japan-Australia grouping, known as the ‘Quad’, has been growing over the last year, especially in the area of defence cooperation. The Ibrahim Mohamed Solih government signed a ‘Framework for a Defence and Security Relationship’ agreement with the United States last year, an initiative that India welcomed.

In November 2020, the Maldives received a Japanese grant of \$7.6 million for the Maldivian Coast Guard and a Maritime Rescue and Coordination Center. Meanwhile, Male's foreign policy choices are increasingly being challenged by sections, mostly opposition groups, wary of "Indian boots on the ground".

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