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INDO-PACIFIC CONTESTATION

Significance for Prelims: Not Much

Significance for Mains: Issues in Indo-Pacific

News: New fault lines are reconfiguring in the Indo-Pacific, and the world is embracing this 'new normal.'

Heart of contestation in Indo-Pacific:

- Indian Ocean and South Asian region's geo-political and geo-economic prominence.
- India's emergence as a major power.
- Intensification of tensions between aggressive China and emerging India.
- Quad partners of New Delhi are making inroads in its backyard.

Widening outreach of China:

- To enhance its strategic ambitions, China has tried to influence these regions.
- The main reasons for Beijing's outreach in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region is to limit Indian influence, military power, and status and to sustain energy supply as well as economic growth.
- With its economic boom, Beijing increased its outreach in South Asia in the early 2000s.
- To meet its strategic ends in the region, Beijing launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013.
- Other methods adopted by Beijing to meet its ends are the provisioning of loans, financial incentives, and mega-infrastructure projects.
- **The outcome of these investments:** (a) Beijing can access the Indian Ocean (b) Enhance political and security ties in the region (c) It can also harbour military

vessels and submarines (d) Beijing took certain islands and ports like Hambantota port of Sri Lanka on lease.

Change in Indian Strategic Thinking:

- After Galwan clashes in 2020, Indian strategic started seeing Beijing as a bigger threat than Islamabad.
- India cannot afford aggression due to the possibility of a two-front war, economic and political fallout, and border and terror challenges from Afghanistan.

Re-energised diplomatic efforts by New Delhi in its backyard:

- Maldives: New Delhi is cooperating with President Ibrahim Solih's 'India First' policy by providing them with massive economic assistance, grants, and infrastructure projects. India and Maldives are also cooperating on maritime security.
- Nepal: Deuba government of Nepal tried to improve Nepal's overall bilateral relations with India.
- Sri Lanka: Since Sri Lanka is in crisis. So, India has provided economic and humanitarian assistance and investments worth \$4 billion this year.

Quad members (Japan, Australia, and the United States) are also interested in South Asia and the Indian Ocean:

- Close cooperation among these partners and genuine alternatives to the BRI collectively push against China.
- Quad members have been assisting Sri Lanka throughout the crisis.
- Japan finalised its talks with Sri Lanka on debt restructuring.
- Maldives, Australia and the U.S. are entering into new areas of cooperation. These countries have opened their embassies in the Maldives.
- U.S. and Maldives signed a defence and security framework, and Nepal and U.S. also ratified the U.S.'s Millennium Challenge Cooperation (Nepal Compact).

Outcomes of the recent success of India and its regional partners: Failed to deter China from furthering its presence in the region.

- Re-entering of Chinese surveillance vessel Yuan Wang-5 in Sri Lanka the Indian Ocean at Sri Lanka.
- Another vessel of the Yuan Wang series entered the Indian Ocean, coinciding with the Agni-series missile's test flight.
- Beijing tried to challenge new initiatives such as the Quad and the Colombo Security Conclave by institutionalising its presence in the region through the first-ever China-Indian Ocean Region Forum.

South Asian Countries would make competition between China and India a 'new normal' due to the following reasons

- It is difficult for them to move completely away from China.
- Economic and political turmoil in most South Asian countries, such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- Depletion of forex reserves in many countries, such as Nepal, the Maldives and Bhutan
- Chances of more instability in the region due to upcoming election years for the major part of South Asia may fuel political opportunism in the region.

Conclusion and Way Forward: India and its partners should be ready to embrace these challenges to sustain the recent gains in the region.

Prelims:

Q. Nepal Compact is associated with which of the following?

- (a) India -Nepal
- (b) China -Nepal
- (c) U.S.A-Nepal
- (d) Bangladesh-Nepal

Source: The Hindu

Article: Accepting the new normal in the Indo-Pacific contestation

Sharad

