

# Indo-Sri Lankan Nexus Under SLINEX (India And Sri Lanka Naval Exercise)

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## Abstract

Maritime security has emerged as a central pillar in the strategic discourse of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), where India and Sri Lanka occupy pivotal geographic positions. The Sri Lanka–India Naval Exercise (SLINEX), initiated in 2005, serves as a vital bilateral mechanism to enhance operational synergy, maritime domain awareness, and mutual trust between the two nations. Over the years, SLINEX has evolved from basic, single-phase drills into advanced, multi-phase exercises incorporating complex maneuvers, maritime patrol aircraft, and joint special operations, reflecting an expanding scope and ambition. The challenges persist in addressing evolving maritime threats, ensuring sustained interoperability, and aligning cooperative strategies with broader regional security architectures. The paper critically examines SLINEX by tracing its evolution and strategic significance in fostering maritime cooperation, evaluating its role in strengthening regional security and joint operational capabilities, and assessing the geopolitical, diplomatic, and maritime security implications of the Indo–Sri Lankan naval partnership. The paper adopted a descriptive analytical approach and contextualizes SLINEX within contemporary maritime security frameworks and Indo–Pacific strategic alignments, offering nuanced insights into how the bilateral naval exercise contributes to both nations' security imperatives addressing emerging maritime challenges. The findings reveal that SLINEX has evolved since 2005 into a sophisticated naval partnership, enhancing India–Sri Lanka interoperability, maritime security, and regional stability, countering external influence, advancing the SAGAR vision, and strengthening geopolitical, diplomatic, and operational capabilities in the Indian Ocean Region.

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## INTRODUCTION

The security and stability of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) are critical to the geopolitical interests of South Asia and global maritime trade. At the heart of these concerns lies the enduring partnership between India and Sri Lanka, exemplified by their flagship naval exercise: SLINEX (Sri Lanka–India Naval Exercise). Since its inception in 2005, SLINEX has grown into a defining element of regional defense diplomacy, reflecting a shared resolve to address maritime threats and foster cooperation amid shifting strategic challenges. SLINEX began as a modest bilateral initiative primarily aimed at enhancing operational compatibility between the Indian and Sri Lankan navies. In the early years, the exercise revolved around basic seamanship, communication, and search-and-rescue drills. However, with increasing complexity in the region's maritime domain, SLINEX has evolved considerably. Now conducted annually, the exercise celebrated its eleventh edition in December 2024, off Visakhapatnam, organized by the Indian Navy's Eastern Naval Command. At its core, SLINEX has grown to encompass advanced tactical maneuvers such as joint Special Forces operations, gun firings, anti-air exercises, integrated helicopter missions, and sophisticated navigation and communication tasks.

The exercise is divided into two main phases: the Harbour Phase, focusing on professional exchanges and joint planning, and the Sea Phase, where Indian and Sri Lankan vessels—such as INS Sumitra and SLNS Sayura in the 2024 exercise—take on coordinated tactical challenges. The evolution signifies not only strengthened military-to-military ties but also an alignment of strategic priorities to ensure a stable and secure IOR.

As the Indian Ocean becomes an arena of contestation and diverse non-traditional threats like piracy, narcotics trafficking, and maritime terrorism proliferates, SLINEX's role grows more critical. The exercises facilitate maritime domain awareness, real-time intelligence sharing, and crisis response coordination—all major requirements for maintaining regional security. These efforts directly contribute to the SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) doctrine championed by India, which seeks a free, open, and rules-based maritime order. SLINEX is also a vital link in India's strategy of multilateral maritime engagement. It augments trilateral mechanisms such as the Colombo Security Conclave and partners with exercises like Dosti involving the Maldives, underpinning a networked approach to

common security challenges. By enhancing interoperability, SLINEX ensures readiness for joint operations ranging from combat missions to disaster response and humanitarian assistance. The geopolitical significance of SLINEX is heightened by the Indian Ocean's strategic importance and the growing interests of external powers, notably China. The exercise promotes transparency and builds mutual trust, ensuring that Sri Lanka's sovereignty aligns with regional stability and that neither country's territory is leveraged to threaten the other. Diplomatically, the annual exercise has been complemented by high-level dialogues and visits, such as the 2024 official trip by Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake to India, which reinforced defense cooperation agreements and signalled a continuing commitment to neutrality amidst global power competition. SLINEX has, since 2005, evolved from simple drills to a robust framework for security collaboration and strategic dialogue. Through its regular, increasingly sophisticated editions, SLINEX exemplifies the Indo-Sri Lankan nexus and sets a benchmark for bilateral maritime cooperation. It not only strengthens operational capacities but also fosters diplomatic bonding, ensuring that both nations remain pivotal guardians of the Indian Ocean's peace and prosperity.

### **Objectives**

1. To analyze the evolution and strategic significance of SLINEX as a bilateral naval exercise between India and Sri Lanka in enhancing maritime cooperation.
2. To examine the role of SLINEX in strengthening regional security, interoperability, and joint operational capabilities in the Indian Ocean Region.
3. To assess the geopolitical, diplomatic, and maritime security implications of the Indo-Sri Lankan naval partnership within the broader framework of regional and global cooperative mechanisms.

### **Problem statement**

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR), connecting Asia, Africa, and Oceania, serves as one of the world's busiest maritime corridors, carrying the bulk of global oil shipments and strategic trade flows. Its vast expanse, coupled with critical chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Malacca Strait, makes the region both economically vital and geopolitically contested. For India and Sri Lanka—maritime neighbours bound by shared cultural ties and geographic proximity—securing these waters is a matter of national and regional priority. In this context, SLINEX (Sri Lanka-India Naval Exercise) was initiated in 2005 to strengthen bilateral maritime cooperation, enhance interoperability, and address common security challenges. However, despite multiple editions and growing operational engagement, the IOR continues to face persistent threats including piracy, smuggling, illegal fishing, maritime terrorism, and external strategic competition. The problem lies in understanding to what extent SLINEX has evolved from a symbolic exercise into an effective tool for collective security and how it contributes to the broader Indo-Sri Lankan nexus within regional and multilateral maritime frameworks.

### **Theoretical framework**

The Indo-Sri Lankan naval partnership under SLINEX can be understood through the combined application of Realism (Morgenthau, 1948), Liberal Institutionalism (Keohane, 1984), and Regional Security Complex Theory (Buzan & Wæver, 2003), each offering distinct insights into the strategic, cooperative, and geopolitical dimensions of the exercise. Realism provides the most direct lens for understanding the evolution and strategic significance of SLINEX. In an anarchic international system, where no central authority ensures security, states act to maximize their power and protect sovereignty. SLINEX, since its initiation in 2005, can be seen as an instrument of strategic deterrence and preparedness against both traditional and non-traditional threats in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). For India, the exercise reinforces its naval dominance and secures vital sea lines of communication, for Sri Lanka; it ensures maritime defense support from a regional power. The realist logic explains why both nations invest in sustained military engagement despite occasional political frictions—security imperatives override other considerations.

Liberal Institutionalism focuses on how international cooperation, when formalized through regular exercises and shared protocols, reduces mistrust and improves operational efficiency. SLINEX functions as a practical, recurring institution where both navies exchange operational knowledge, standardize communication systems, and train with compatible technologies. Harbour and sea phases build procedural familiarity, making joint operations in real-world crises more seamless. This reflects Keohane's (1984) argument that repeated interactions in institutionalized settings promote stable cooperation even in a competitive environment. The exercise thus contributes to regional security not merely through force projection, but through trust-building and capability integration.

The Regional Security Complex Theory (Buzan & Wæver, 2003) frames India and Sri Lanka as part of a tightly linked maritime security complex, where their geographic proximity and shared vulnerabilities bind their strategic destinies. SLINEX operates within the regional security web, reinforcing Sri Lanka's role as a main partner in India's "Neighbourhood First" and SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) policies. At the same time, it positions Sri Lanka as a stabilizing actor amid growing great-power competition in the Indo-Pacific, especially in light of China's increasing presence in the IOR. The cooperation not only strengthens bilateral ties but also sends a diplomatic signal to external actors about the cohesiveness of regional security arrangements. Through the multi-theoretical application, it becomes clear that SLINEX serves simultaneously as a realist tool of deterrence and defense, a liberal institution for trust and interoperability, and a regional mechanism for geopolitical positioning. The exercise's evolution over its 11 editions reflects the interplay of these forces, demonstrating that its value lies not just in tactical outcomes, but in its capacity to align strategic interests, institutional cooperation, and regional security priorities in a complex and contested maritime environment.

## METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive method with a qualitative approach to analyze the Indo–Sri Lankan naval cooperation under SLINEX. Secondary data was gathered from official naval press releases, Ministry of Defence reports, government publications, academic articles, maritime security databases, and credible news sources. A descriptive analysis was used to present the chronological evolution of SLINEX from 2005 to 2023, covering editions, locations, participants, and phases. The qualitative component focused on identifying patterns and insights relevant to the study's objectives, emphasizing strategic significance, regional security contributions, and geopolitical implications. The data was cross-verified across multiple sources to ensure accuracy and validity, providing a balanced factual and analytical understanding of SLINEX in the broader Indo-Pacific security framework.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Evolution and Strategic Significance of SLINEX in Indo–Sri Lankan Maritime Cooperation

SLINEX, or the Sri Lanka–India Naval Exercise, was initiated in 2005 as a bilateral initiative to foster maritime cooperation between India and Sri Lanka. Originally, exercises were modest in scope, focusing on basic operations such as maritime search and rescue, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief. Over the years, the exercise has expanded significantly in both complexity and ambition, becoming an annual fixture that alternates between Indian and Sri Lankan waters and involves modern warships, Special Forces, marine aviation, and advanced joint tactical operations. Each SLINEX exercise is structured in two phases: a Harbour Phase emphasizing professional and social exchanges to deepen mutual understanding, and a Sea Phase devoted to complex, operational drills. Recent editions, such as SLINEX 24 (December 17–20, 2024, Visakhapatnam), saw participation from INS Sumitra and SLNS Sayura, each with embarked Special Forces teams. Activities included coordinated gun firings, seamanship evolutions, communication procedures, navigation, and helicopter operations, reflecting the increasing technological and tactical sophistication of the drills.

The evolution of SLINEX mirrors the changing security landscape of the Indian Ocean region. As both India and Sri Lanka face rising challenges from maritime terrorism, piracy, illegal trafficking, and geopolitical complexities—such as increased Chinese naval presence—the exercise has become a platform for consolidating defence cooperation, operational synergy, and mutual trust. It enables both navies to enhance interoperability, share best practices, and strengthen crisis management capabilities in real-world scenarios. SLINEX serves several strategic purposes:

1. **Maritime Security:** By jointly training on modern threats and scenarios, India and Sri Lanka reinforce their commitment to maintaining a safe and rule-based Indian Ocean domain, directly supporting India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision.
2. **Defence Diplomacy:** The exercise boosts bilateral ties and promotes India's "Neighbourhood First" policy. It reassures Sri Lanka of India's intent to support its sovereignty and maritime interests against external pressures.
3. **Capacity Building:** SLINEX facilitates technology transfer, enhances human resources, and strengthens Sri Lanka's naval capabilities to combat non-traditional security threats.

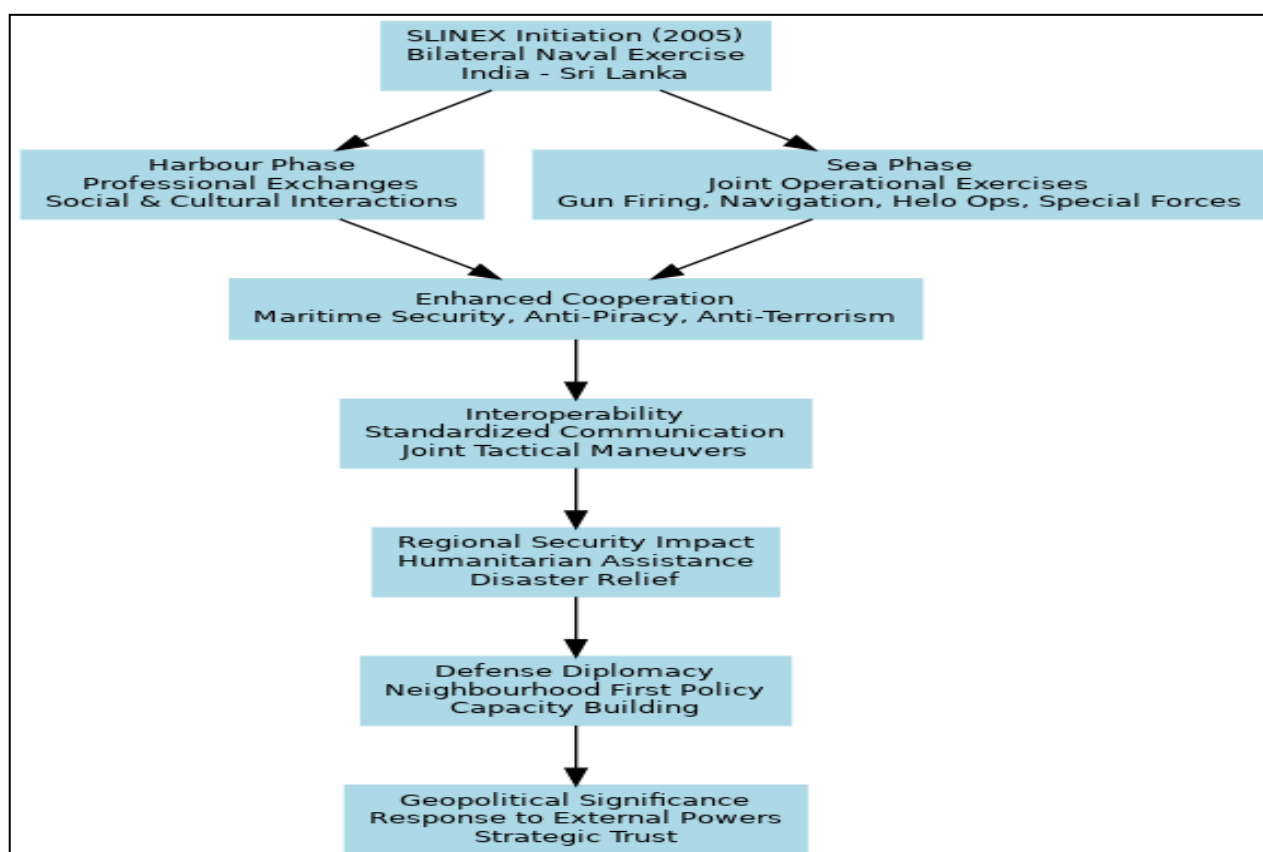
**4. Symbolic Value:** The regular conduct of SLINEX, often coinciding with high-level diplomatic visits, visually reaffirms mutual resolve for regional peace—especially when Sri Lanka publicly asserts its territory will not be used for activities detrimental to Indian interests.

#### **SLINEX and its Role in Strengthening Regional Security and Interoperability in the Indian Ocean**

SLINEX, the bilateral naval exercise between India and Sri Lanka, was initiated in 2005 as a modest effort to enhance maritime cooperation and security in the Indian Ocean Region. Originally concentrating on basic operations such as search and rescue, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief, SLINEX has steadily evolved over nearly two decades into a sophisticated and strategically significant maritime exercise. Through annual or almost annual editions, alternating between Indian and Sri Lankan waters, both navies have demonstrated their commitment to deepening cooperation and addressing complex security challenges like piracy, maritime terrorism, smuggling, and environmental threats. The exercise is divided into two phases: the Harbour Phase, which focuses on professional exchanges, social and cultural interactions to build mutual understanding and camaraderie, and the Sea Phase, involving joint operational exercises. These sea drills have progressively become more complex, including coordinated gun firing, navigation and communication exercises, seamanship evolutions, helicopter operations, and joint Special Forces maneuvers. For example, the 11th edition, SLINEX 2024, was held from December 17 to 20 in Visakhapatnam, India, featuring the Indian Navy's INS Sumitra and the Sri Lankan Navy's SLNS Sayura, both embarked with Special Forces teams, engaging in live artillery firing, communication drills, and collaborative helicopter operations.

#### **SLINEX and Its Role in Strengthening Regional Security**

Over the years, SLINEX has marked significant milestones reflecting expanding naval capabilities and strategic trust. The 4th edition in 2015 off Trincomalee, Sri Lanka, witnessed participation from multiple



Indian ships including INS Kora, INS Kirpan, and INS Savitri, alongside Sri Lankan vessels SLNS Sayura, SLNS Samudura, and SLNS Sagara. The 2018 exercise near Trincomalee included Indian ships INS Sumitra, INS Kirch, and INS Cora, with Sri Lankan counterparts SLNS Sayurala, SLNS Samudura, and SLNS Suranimala, supported by aviation assets, demonstrating enhanced multi-domain operations. In 2019 and 2020, the exercises incorporated advanced warships such as the Indian anti-submarine corvettes INS Kamorta and INS Kiltan, underscoring high operational sophistication amid growing regional strategic tensions. SLINEX 2023 took place in Colombo, involving modern Indian vessels INS Kiltan and

INS Savitri, and Sri Lankan ships SLNS Gajabahu and SLNS Sagara, alongside helicopters and maritime patrol aircraft, further broadening joint operational exposure. Strategically, SLINEX serves multiple vital functions. It fosters maritime security cooperation by improving joint patrols, intelligence sharing, and coordinated responses to non-traditional threats like piracy and trafficking, reinforcing a safe and rule-based maritime domain in line with India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision. The exercise enhances interoperability by standardizing communication protocols, joint tactical maneuvers, and crisis response, enabling both navies to operate seamlessly under complex scenarios. It also strengthens preparedness for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, essential for the disaster-prone Indian Ocean region. SLINEX acts as a pillar of defense diplomacy, affirming India's "Neighbourhood First" policy and enabling capacity building for Sri Lanka through technology transfers and tactical training, which are critical for naval modernization and independent maritime security. In light of increasing geopolitical complexities, notably the growing presence of external powers in the Indian Ocean, SLINEX symbolizes a clear, cooperative regional commitment between India and Sri Lanka to peace, stability, and maritime order. The exercise's transformation from basic drills in 2005 to multi-dimensional operations involving advanced vessels, aviation assets, Special Forces, and complex warfare simulations illustrates its strategic maturity. It represents a cornerstone of maritime partnership, continuously adapting to new threats and operational requirements, thereby significantly contributing to the collective security architecture of the Indian Ocean Region.

#### **Geopolitical and Diplomatic Implications of the Indo-Sri Lankan Naval Partnership**

The Indo-Sri Lankan naval partnership, anchored by the SLINEX series of exercises, has evolved since 2005 into a significant pillar of regional maritime security and diplomatic cooperation. SLINEX was launched in 2005 as a bilateral naval exercise aimed at enhancing maritime cooperation through activities such as search and rescue, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief. Over nearly two decades, it has grown in scale and complexity, becoming an annual or near-annual exercise alternating between Indian and Sri Lankan waters. The evolution reflects an increasing strategic alignment and mutual recognition of shared maritime security challenges including piracy, maritime terrorism, smuggling, and environmental threats.

Historically, SLINEX has expanded its operational scope from basic drills to sophisticated multi-domain maritime exercises. For instance, SLINEX 2013 conducted near Goa involved replenishment at sea operations, visit-board-search-seizure exercises, and asymmetric threat responses using INS Talwar and SLNS Sagara. By 2015, the fourth edition off Trincomalee involved multiple Indian vessels such as INS Kora, INS Kirpan, and INS Savitri, coordinated with Sri Lankan ships SLNS Sayura, SLNS Samudura, and SLNS Sagara. Exercises in 2018 and 2020 incorporated more advanced assets, including Indian anti-submarine corvettes INS Kamorta and INS Kiltan, offshore patrol vessels SLNS Sayura and SLNS Gajabahu of Sri Lanka, and aviation units. SLINEX 2023 held in Colombo featured sophisticated joint operations with INS Kiltan and INS Savitri, supported by maritime patrol aircraft and helicopters, involving Special Forces on both sides. The latest edition, SLINEX 2024, held in Visakhapatnam, saw INS Sumitra and SLNS Sayura operate with embarked Special Forces teams engaging in gun firing, navigation, communication, and helicopter exercises, underscoring heightened interoperability and operational readiness.

Geopolitically, the partnership strengthens India's role as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region, supporting its SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision by safeguarding critical sea lines of communication that pass near Sri Lankan waters, including strategic ports like Trincomalee. The bilateral exercises and enhanced naval collaboration counterbalance the growing influence of extra-regional powers, primarily China, whose expanding footprint in the Indian Ocean poses new strategic challenges.

The naval partnership bolsters India's Neighborhood First policy by deepening trust and cooperation with Sri Lanka through regular military engagements, intelligence sharing, and capacity-building initiatives. It complements trilateral dialogues such as the India-Sri Lanka-Maldives security framework that seeks integrated regional maritime security cooperation. However, Sri Lanka continues to balance its ties with China, making the partnership a nuanced diplomatic undertaking that influences regional alignments. Maritime security-wise, the Indo-Sri Lankan naval collaboration has enhanced crisis management, joint domain awareness, and interoperability between both navies. From its inception focused on basic exercises, SLINEX now incorporates complex multi-unit operations involving advanced warships, aviation assets, Special Forces, and comprehensive communication drills, thereby improving

preparedness against traditional and non-traditional threats. This sustained operational synergy facilitates coordinated responses during emergencies, combats illegal maritime activities, and protects regional maritime stability. Indo-Sri Lankan naval partnership through SLINEX and broader defence agreements represents a strategic convergence that contributes significantly to regional security architecture. It embodies growing bilateral and multilateral cooperation vital to maintaining peace, stability, and a rules-based order in the increasingly contested Indian Ocean Region. The historical milestones from 2005 through 2024 illustrate the maturation and expanding strategic value of the partnership within the evolving geopolitical and maritime context of South Asia.

**Table 1. Editions of SLINEX (Sri Lanka-India Naval Exercise) and Their main Details**

| S.No | Edition      | Year and Date                      | Place                       | Participants - India Ships   | Participants - Sri Lanka Ships  | Phases                                      |
|------|--------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|---|---|
| 1    | 1st Edition  | 12-16 Dec 2005                     | Bay of Bengal               | INS Sukanya and INS Kirpan   | Three naval ships   | Single                                      |
| 2    | 2nd Edition  | 19-23 Sep 2011                     | Trincomalee                 | INS Ranvijay, INS Shivalik, INS Gharial, INS Khanjar, INS Cheriya, INS Coradiv with helicopters & Dornier patrol vessels | 11 SLNS ships   | Single                                      |
| 3    | 3rd Edition  | 4-7 Nov 2013                       | Coast of Goa                | INS Talwar (integral helicopter)   | SLNS Sagara   | Single                                      |
| 4    | 4th Edition  | 27 Oct-15 Nov 2015 (between dates) | Trincomalee                 | INS Kora, INS Kirpan, INS Savithri   | SLNS Sayura, SLNS Samudra, SLNS Sagara with fast attack crafts, two fast gun boats, one fast missile vessel | Two phases - Harbour & Sea                  |
| 5    | 5th Edition  | 7-14 Sep 2017                      | Vishakhapatnam              | INS Gharial, INS Kora  | SLNS Sayura, SLNS Sagara  | Single                                      |
| 6    | 6th Edition  | 7-13 Sep 2018                      | Trincomalee                 | INS Kiran, INS Sumitra, INS Cora Divh  | SLNS Sayurala   | Single                                      |
| 7    | 7th Edition  | 7-12 Sep 2019                      | Vizag Coast, Vishakhapatnam | INS Khukri, INS Sumedha  | SLNS Sindhurala, SLNS Suranimala  | Single                                      |
| 8    | 8th Edition  | 19-21 Oct 2020                     | Trincomalee                 | INS Kiltan, INS Kamorta with Dornier aircraft and helicopters  | SLNS Sayura, SLNS Gajabahu  | Single                                      |
| 9    | 9th Edition  | 7-10 Mar 2022                      | Vishakhapatnam              | INS Jyoti, INS Kiran   | SLNS Sayurala   | Two phases - 7-8 Mar Harbour & 9-10 Mar Sea |
| 10   | 10th Edition | 3-5 Apr 2023 (Harbour),            | Colombo                     | INS Kiltan, INS Kamorta, INS Savitri   | SLNS Gajabahu, SLNS Sagara  | Two phases -                                |

|    |                 |   |                |                                |                                |                  |
|----|-----------------|---|----------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|
|    |                 | 6-8 Apr<br>2023 (Sea)                         |                |                                |                                | Harbour<br>& Sea |
| 11 | 11th<br>Edition | 17-18 Dec<br>(Harbour),<br>19-20 Dec<br>(Sea) | Vishakhapatnam | INS Sumitra,<br>special forces | SLNS Sayura,<br>special forces | Two phas         |

The SLINEX series, from its inception in 2005 to the 11th edition in 2024, has evolved from modest single-phase drills involving a few ships into a comprehensive bilateral naval exercise with complex two-phase formats, diverse modern assets, and strategic geographic coverage across the Indian Ocean Region. Early editions focused on basic cooperation, later exercises saw larger and more advanced fleets, integration of maritime patrol aircraft, Special Forces, and sophisticated joint operations, reflecting growing interoperability, operational readiness, and deepening India-Sri Lanka maritime cooperation aimed at enhancing regional security.

### Final Reflections

1. SLINEX, the bilateral naval exercise between India and Sri Lanka, was initiated in 2005 and has evolved from simple maritime operations such as search and rescue and humanitarian assistance to complex multi-domain naval drills involving Special Forces, gun firings, helicopter operations, and advanced communication and navigation exercises. The evolution marks a significant enhancement in operational sophistication and joint preparedness over nearly two decades.
2. The exercise is regularly conducted, typically annually or near-annually, alternating between Indian and Sri Lankan waters, showcasing sustained bilateral commitment to strengthening maritime cooperation and security in the Indian Ocean Region.
3. SLINEX plays a crucial role in enhancing interoperability between the Indian and Sri Lankan navies by standardizing communication protocols and operational procedures, enabling seamless joint tactical maneuvers and coordinated crisis responses in maritime security scenarios.
4. The exercises have grown to include significant naval assets over the years, such as Indian Naval Ships INS Sumitra, INS Kiltan, INS Kamorta, and Sri Lankan vessels including SLNS Sayura, SLNS Sagara, and SLNS Gajabahu, reflecting the modernization and increased capacity of both navies.
5. Beyond tactical training, SLINEX significantly contributes to regional maritime security by fostering coordinated responses to non-traditional threats such as piracy, maritime terrorism, smuggling, illegal fishing, and environmental hazards along critical sea lanes adjacent to Sri Lanka's strategic ports like Trincomalee.
6. SLINEX embodies India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision, aligning with India's strategic goal to be a net security provider and promoter of a rules-based maritime order in the Indian Ocean, thus reinforcing a secure and stable regional naval environment.
7. Diplomatically, SLINEX reinforces India's "Neighbourhood First" policy by deepening defense diplomacy and bilateral ties with Sri Lanka through sustained naval engagement, intelligence sharing, and capacity-building initiatives, which bolster mutual trust and strategic alignment.
8. The Indo-Sri Lankan naval partnership via SLINEX operates within a broader regional security framework, integrating into multilateral cooperative mechanisms such as trilateral dialogues with Maldives, contributing to collective maritime governance and regional peace.
9. Geopolitically, the partnership helps counterbalance the increasing presence of extra-regional powers, particularly China, in the Indian Ocean Region by enhancing coordinated maritime domain awareness, joint operational capabilities, and crisis management between two vital regional actors.
10. The milestone editions of SLINEX, such as in 2013 (Goa), 2015 (Trincomalee), 2018 and 2020 (Trincomalee), 2023 (Colombo), and 2024 (Visakhapatnam), reflect progressive enhancement of operational complexity, technology integration, and strategic intent, symbolizing a maturing defense partnership that contributes substantially to the security architecture of the wider Indo-Pacific maritime domain.

### CONCLUSION

SLINEX has transformed from a modest bilateral initiative in 2005 into a strategically significant maritime exercise that symbolizes the deepening Indo-Sri Lankan naval partnership. Initially focused on basic humanitarian assistance, search and rescue, and disaster relief, it has evolved into a multi-dimensional platform incorporating advanced warships, Special Forces, aviation assets, and complex joint operations.

The evolution reflects not only the maturing operational capabilities of both navies but also their commitment to addressing a wide spectrum of maritime challenges, from piracy and trafficking to environmental threats and humanitarian crises. Strategically, SLINEX strengthens regional security in the Indian Ocean Region by enhancing interoperability through standardized communication systems, coordinated tactical maneuvers, and joint crisis responses. It fosters mutual trust and operational synergy, enabling both navies to act cohesively in safeguarding maritime trade routes and ensuring a rules-based maritime order. Beyond operational gains, SLINEX serves as a main instrument of defense diplomacy, reinforcing India's SAGAR vision and "Neighbourhood First" policy contributing to Sri Lanka's naval capacity building. In the context of rising geopolitical competition and the growing presence of extra-regional powers, SLINEX stands as a testament to regional solidarity, ensuring stability, resilience, and cooperative security in the Indian Ocean.

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