



Meeting of China-Indian Ocean Region Forum

For Prelims: Indian Ocean region, Indian Ocean Rim Association, SAGAR, IONA, Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure.

For Mains: Implications of Increasing Chinese Influence in Indian Ocean Region.

Why in News?

Recently, the **China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA)**, held a meeting of the **China-Indian Ocean Region Forum** in which 19 countries took part but **not India**.

What are the Key Highlights of the Meet?

- **Theme:** Shared Development: Theory and Practice from the Perspective of the Blue Economy.
- **Participating Countries:**
 - Indonesia, Pakistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Afghanistan, Iran, Oman, South Africa, Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius, Djibouti, Australia and representatives of 3 international organisations were present.
 - India was reportedly not invited.
- **Marine Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Cooperation Mechanism:**
 - China proposed to establish a marine disaster prevention and mitigation cooperation mechanism **between China and countries in the Indian Ocean region**.
 - China expressed its willingness to **provide necessary financial, material, and technical support** to countries in need.

What does China Seek from the Meet?

- China is contending for influence in the **strategic Indian Ocean region with substantial investments in ports** and infrastructure in several countries.
- China has made **substantial investments in ports and infrastructure investments in several countries**, including Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- China has acquired **Sri Lanka's Hambantota port on a 99-year lease besides building the port at Pakistan's Gwadar** in the Arabian Sea opposite India's western coast and infrastructure investments in the Maldives.

What are the Concerns?

- China has often been **accused of engaging in “debt diplomacy” in these countries under its Belt and Road Initiative** allegedly in the name of infrastructure development.
- Since 2008, China has regularly deployed a contingent of naval warships in the Gulf of Aden and established its **first foreign military base in Djibouti in 2017**.
- At the same time India's absence is seen as an attempt to **challenge India's traditional presence in the region** amid apprehensions of politicization of the Indian Ocean region. Moreover, the Chinese Foreign Ministry refused to disclose **who the participants were from**.

other countries.

- India has been a traditional partner and supporter of Indian Ocean Region (IOR) countries.

How is India's Presence in IORA?

- In addition, to act as a first responder during major crises in the littoral countries, India regularly engages with the **Indian Ocean littoral countries through such mechanisms as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)** and **Indian Ocean Navies Symposium (IONS)** under the vision of **Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)**.
- India has strong influence in the Indian Ocean region where India-backed organisations like the IORA have taken strong roots.
- India continues to **promote its official policy of “coordination, cooperation and partnership”** in the regional maritime domain.
- As coordinator to the priority area on disaster risk management, India has published guidelines for IORA. It has also urged partners to join the **Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure** launched at the UN in September 2019.
- India has been trying to emerge as the net provider of information in the IOR and in that direction it created the **Information Fusion Centre** located in Gurugram to assist member countries of IOR with real-time crisis information. Bangladesh, Mauritius, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Seychelles have been part of the information support structure of India.

What is the Indian Ocean Rim Association?

- It was **established in 1997** and is a regional forum that seeks to build and expand understanding and mutually beneficial cooperation through a consensus-based, evolutionary and non-intrusive approach.
- **IORA has 23 member states** and 9 Dialogue Partners.
 - **Members:** Australia, Bangladesh, the Comoros, France, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.
 - **China is a dialogue partner** in the IORA.
- The IORA Secretariat is based in **Mauritius**.
- The association gains importance by the fact that the Indian Ocean carries half of the world's container ships, one-third of the world's bulk cargo traffic and two-thirds of the world's oil shipments.
- It is a **lifeline of international trade and transport and the Indian ocean region is woven together by trade routes** and commands control of major sea-lanes.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Q. With reference to ‘Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC)’, consider the following statements: (2015)

1. It was established very recently in response to incidents of piracy and accidents of oil spills.
2. It is an alliance meant for maritime security only.

Which of the statements given above is/ are correct?

- (a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (d)

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