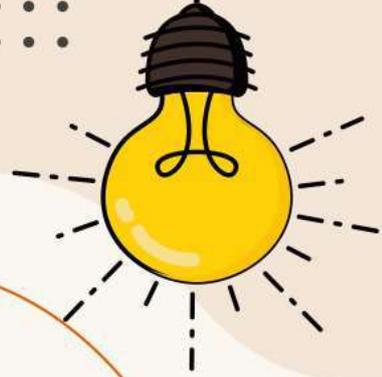




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Current Affairs
International Relations

28. To what extent IOM (indian ocean meet) can replace the relevance of IORA (indian Ocean rim association)? Explain India's effort to counter China's influence in this region.

इंडियन ओशन मीट किस हद तक I O R A (इंडियन ओशन रिम एसोसिएशन) की प्रासंगिकता को बदल सकता है? इस क्षेत्र में चीन के प्रभाव का मुकाबला करने के लिए भारत के प्रयासों की व्याख्या कीजिए।

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28. To what extent IOM (Indian Ocean Meet) can replace the relevance of IORA (Indian Ocean Rim Association)? Explain India's effort to counter China's influence in this region.

Introduction

Recently, China organised a maiden "China-Indian Ocean Region Forum" bringing together 19 nations from the region. Experts say that the Chinese conference reportedly is geared at combating India's considerable influence in the Indian Ocean area where India-backed groups like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) have set deep roots.

IOM (Indian Ocean Meet) cannot replace IORA

- ✘ **Participation:** IORA is an inter-governmental organisation which was established in March 1997 includes 23 Member States and 9 Dialogue Partners. But participants of IOM is limited 19 countries and 3 dialogue partners. With this limited membership IOM cannot be an alternative to IORA
- ✘ **Countries refusal:** Countries like Australia and Maldives refused to participate in the meet. It shows that countries are reluctant about the influence and dominance of China in this region.
- ✘ **Limited objective:** Objectives of IOM is limited to disaster management but objective of IORA extended in every sphere like sustainable development, blue economy, free trade, disaster management, security....etc
- ✘ In the name of infrastructure development, China has been frequently accused of using its Belt and Road Initiative to engage in "debt diplomacy" in these nations.

IOM (Indian Ocean Meet) can replace the relevance of IORA

- ✘ **Neglecting IORA members:** China is deliberately eliminating India and other member of IORA. India was reportedly not invited for the meet and also not invited for meet held last year with some south Asian countries COVID-19 vaccine cooperation without the participation
- ✘ The Chinese forum apparently is aimed at countering India's strong influence in the Indian Ocean region where India-backed organisations like the Indian Ocean Rim Association, (IORA), which has a membership of 23 countries have taken strong root
- ✘ IORA lacks the funds and resources to carry out its many tasks. However, China is willing to give the necessary financial, material, and technological help to forum members.

Increasing China's influence in Indian ocean region

- ✘ China's growing submergence in the Indian Ocean is indicative of its strategic ambitions in India's neighborhood.
- ✘ China is competing for influence in the strategically important Indian Ocean area by investing heavily in ports and infrastructure in a number of nations.
- ✘ China has created its first naval station outside of its borders in Djibouti.
- ✘ In addition to acquiring the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka on a 99-year lease, China has constructed the Gwadar port in Pakistan across the Arabian Sea from India's western coast.
- ✘ China has also invested in the Maldives' infrastructure.
- ✘ The rate of growth of Chinese investments in port infrastructure in Kenya, Sudan, Tanzania, and Mozambique has been consistent.

India's effort to counter China's influence in Indian Ocean

- ✘ **India's String of pearls:** India is constructing its own "string of pearls" to bolster its position in opposition to a more forceful Chinese presence.
- ✘ **Project SAGAR:** The purpose of India's Project SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) is to revitalise India's traditional trade routes and cultural ties throughout the Indian Ocean. It is a response to China's maritime silk road initiative.
- ✘ **Naval base:** India finalised a new base agreement in the Seychelles and negotiated military access to naval facilities at Oman's port and airfields. In 2017, Singapore and the United States signed an agreement permitting deployments from each other's naval bases. With the expansion of its bases on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands at the end of the Malacca Strait, India is upping the ante in the battle for Southeast Asian waters.
- ✘ **Chabahar port:** India is constructing Chabahar port in Iran, therefore offering a new land-sea route to Central Asian nations that bypasses Pakistan. As it overlooks the Gulf of Oman, a particularly critical oil supply route, Chabahar affords India a strategic location.
- ✘ **Cooperation with French:** Recent negotiations between France and New Delhi resulted in the opening of each nation's naval bases to the other's vessels in the Indian Ocean. This provides the Indian navy with access to strategically significant French ports, notably one in Djibouti that provides quick access to major oil supply and commerce routes.
- ✘ **QUAD:** India has also entered into strategic agreements with Japan, Australia, and the United States for regional military cooperation. The four nations known as the 'Quad' conduct combined military drills in the IOR area.
- ✘ **Act east:** The Act East Policy is India's initiative to integrate its economy with that of South East Asian countries. It has been used to negotiate significant military and strategic agreements with Vietnam, South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, and Singapore, therefore assisting India in its opposition to China in IOR

Other efforts

- o Prime Minister Modi concluded an arrangement for a new base in the Seychelles and secured military access to port and airfield facilities in Oman.
- o India inked a naval cooperation deal with Singapore and Indonesia.
- o India's bases in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands have been extended.
- o India has come to the realisation that it must match China's aggressiveness, which includes growing its influence in the Pacific.
- o India is constructing a security grid with the littoral nations to avoid the militarization of the Indian Ocean.

Way forward

- ✍ India must also devise a strategy to persuade China to play a role in order to maintain a stable regional security system. This is especially true given China's position in Pakistan, where it must balance commerce and terrorism.
- ✍ Despite this mutual trust method, the need of military capability in ensuring national security cannot be overstated. Therefore, India would be better served by adopting a more nuanced 'smart-balancing' policy towards China.
- ✍ It has been argued that India could utilise its \$70 billion trade ties with China as a negotiating tool to control Chinese conduct.
- ✍ India must develop its own maritime and land connections with its neighbours.
- ✍ For the Indian Ocean RIM Association to be a force multiplier for India's interests, bilateral ties with other nations in this area must be revitalised.
- ✍ Important is the maintenance of peace and stability in the Indian Ocean. The militarization of the Indian Ocean should be avoided.
- ✍ The littoral nations must build an appropriate structure to address any form of crisis, whether natural or otherwise.

