



## CHINA-INDIAN OCEAN REGION FORUM

### WHY IN NEWS?

- Recently, China's top development aid agency convened the first "China-Indian Ocean Region Forum" in the southwestern Chinese city of Kunming.

### ABOUT CHINA INDIAN OCEAN REGION FORUM

- It is organised by the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA)
  - It is the latest Chinese initiative focusing on the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
  - It underline China's growing strategic interests in a region where its economic footprint has been deepening.
  - Theme: Shared Development: Theory and Practice from the Perspective of the Blue Economy.
  - It is headed by the former Vice Foreign Minister of China.
  - Aim: To establish a marine disaster prevention and mitigation cooperation mechanism between China and countries in the Indian Ocean region
- Participating Nation: Indonesia, Pakistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Afghanistan, Iran, Oman, South Africa, Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius, Djibouti, and Australia.
  - But at least two of those countries, Australia and Maldives, subsequently released statements rebutting the claim, emphasising that they did not participate officially.



### SIGNIFICANCE OF FORUM

- The enormous resource base of the Indian Ocean, China's prominent position in global supply chains, and the passage of important maritime communication routes through the IOR
- China is increasing its military presence in IOR waters on a regular basis.



## **CHINA-INDIAN OCEAN REGION FORUM**

- In Djibouti, which is close to the Horn of Africa, Beijing built its first military base abroad.
- Chinese military planners has a long-term plan to deploy six aircraft carriers to protect China's maritime interests, with two of them being stationed in the Indian Ocean region.
- China has been relentlessly trying to ramp up political, economic and security inroads in the region despite being geographically far from IOR.
- Apparently aimed at countering India's strong influence in the region.
- China has often been accused of engaging in "debt diplomacy".

### **CONCERN BY INDIA**

- India's stand: India has viewed China's recent moves in the region warily, including the recent visit of a Chinese military tracking vessel, the Yuan Wang 5, to Sri Lanka.
  - India sees the IORA as an already established platform for the region, which has 23 members, including Australia and Maldives with 10 dialogue partners which include China, Japan, Russia, the U.K. and the U.S.
- China's initiation of a new forum for IOR countries despite the other successfully established forums is worrisome.

### **WAY FORWARD**

- India has a central role in the region and for regional actors. Thus, IOR countries should not ignore India's strategic interests and concerns.
- India's importance in the region can not be marginalised as there is a growing trust deficit when it comes to China.

### **ABOUT INDIAN OCEAN RIM ASSOCIATION (IORA)**

- 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.
- The IORA Secretariat is based in Mauritius.