Indian Ocean Rim Association- A Key Bloc for India

Why in news?

Recently Indian Ocean Rim Association's Council of Ministers meeting was held under the theme 'Reinforcing Indian Ocean Identity'.

What is Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)?

- A dynamic *inter-governmental organisation* and a *regional forum*.
- It is a tri-partite forum that brings together representatives of government, business and academia.
- **Established in**- 7 March 1997.
- **Objective-** Strengthening regional cooperation and sustainable development within the Indian Ocean Region.
- **Apex body-** Council of (Foreign) Ministers (COM) which meets annually



- **Membership**- 23 Member States and 11 Dialogue Partners
  - **Non-members**- Pakistan, Myanmar
  - **Latest member**- France
- **Dialogue Partners** –Italy, Japan, Germany, China, USA, UK, Russia, Turkey, Korea and Egypt
  - Saudi Arabia has been admitted as the 11th Dialogue Partner in IORA in 2023.
- **Troika-** It was established by the Council of Ministers which consists of
  - **Chair-** Sri Lanka
  - **Vice Chair**- India
  - **Previous chair**-Bangladesh



Why does Indian Ocean Region matter?

> One third of the world's population live in IOR with 80% of global oil trade, 50% of the world's containerised cargo and 33% of its bulk cargo passing through it.

- **Strategic location** - It enjoys a privileged location at the crossroads of global trade, connecting the major engines of the international economy in the Northern Atlantic and Asia-Pacific.
- Its littoral is vast, densely populated, and comprised of some of the world's fastest growing regions.
- **Trade-** The region produces a combined total of 1 trillion dollar in goods and services

and intra-IORA trade is billed at around $800 billion.
- It is a major conduit for international trade, especially energy.
- **Resources** - The Ocean is also a valuable source of fishing and mineral resources.
- Mineral resources with nodules containing nickel, cobalt, and iron, and sulphide deposits of manganese, copper, iron, zinc, silver, and gold are present in sizeable quantities on the sea bed.

China - Indian Ocean Region Forum

- China convened the 1st 'China-Indian Ocean Region Forum' bringing together *19 countries from the region except India.*
- The first Indian Ocean Region Forum on Development Cooperation (IORFDC) was held in *Kunming city in China.*
- **Purpose-** To establish a marine disaster prevention and mitigation cooperation mechanism between China and countries in the Indian Ocean region (IOR).

What is the role of India?

- **Major revitalization**-There has been a growing direction and determination to strengthen institutions and capacities within IORA when India became the *IORA Chair for the period 2011-2013.*
- **Priority areas-** During India's chairmanship it identified 6 Priority and 2 Focus Areas to promote sustained growth and balanced development in the Indian Ocean Region.

- **Foster research**- The *Chair of Indian Ocean Studies* was revived in 2014 after a gap of almost 15 years which is jointly sponsored by India and Mauritius.
  - It plays a bridging role in fostering research activities and studies in IORA priority areas with other academic institutions of IORA Member States.
- **Counter China-** Through this forum, Indian Ocean can be maintained as a *free, open and inclusive space* where there was respect for soverignity and territorial integrity based on UN Convention on the Law of the Seas.
  - This would prevent the unviable projects, hidden agenda and unsustainable debt to the countries in Indian Ocean Region.
- **Focus on SAGAR**- It is an important instrument for pursuing the vision for a sustainable and prosperous future in the region with commitment to, Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR).
- However, exclusion of Pakistan makes IORA a less contentious space for India, compared to groupings like Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

What does IORA focus on?

- **IORA special fund-** It was established at Tehran in 2006 in line with the principles and objectives enshrined in the Charter as well as the objectives and goals envisaged by the relevant organs of the Association.
- **New areas of focus**- Australia, during its period as Chair, (2013 – 2015), sustained

the momentum through sharpening IORA's strategic focus with the adoption of two cross-cutting issues
    - Blue Economy and
    - Women's Economic Empowerment.
- **Jakarta Concord-** Indonesia during its chair in 2017 formulated this to ensure that the Indian Ocean is a region of peace, stability and development through enhanced cooperation.
- IORA Action Plan adopted setting short-, medium- and long-term goals in each of IORA's Priority areas.
- **Specialised agencies**- IORA has established
    - Regional Centre for Science and Technology Transfer (RCSTT) at Tehran, Iran
    - Fisheries Support Unit (FSU) at Oman.
- **Indian Ocean Dialogue (IOD)** - Flagship initiative of IORA.
    - **Origin-**13th Council of Ministers meeting, held in 2013 in Perth, Australia.
    - **India-** Hosted the 8th edition of IOD virtually in 2021.
- **IORA Sustainable Development programme-** It was developed in 2014 with a special focus on the practical requirements of lesser developed Member States, in order to encourage their active participation and to optimize benefits arising from IORA cooperation.

References

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2. IORA- About IORA
3. Ministry of External Affairs- India's role in IORA

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