

Indian Ocean Rim Association and India's Role

Background:

Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) - formerly known as Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) - currently represents a grouping of **21(of 36)** countries (Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Malaysia, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, UAE and Yemen) whose shores are washed by the Indian Ocean and collectively aims at enhancing economic cooperation for sustained development and balanced economic growth of its members. It has **7 Dialogue Partners**: China, Egypt, France, Japan, UK, USA and Germany. The name IORA was adopted in November 2013 in Perth, Australia during the 13th meeting of Foreign Ministers.

2. The IORA Secretariat is located at Port Louis, Mauritius and is currently headed by ***Ambassador KV Bhagirath, IFS (Retd)***. India, South Africa, Indonesia and Australia have seconded one Director each to the Secretariat.
3. The highest level of the Association is the Council Of Ministers (***COM***) bringing together Foreign Ministers of the member countries; other mechanisms include the Committee of Senior Officials (***CSO***), IOR Academic Group (bringing together scholars/scientists/experts), IOR Business Forum (bringing together business communities of member countries) and the Working Group on Trade and Investment (***WGTI***).
4. ***The first ever IORA Leaders' Summit is scheduled to be held on March 7, 2017 at Jakarta, Indonesia to commemorate the 20th Anniversary of the Association.***
5. IORA has established two Specialised Agencies; the Regional Centre for Science and Technology Transfer (***RCSTT***) based at Tehran, Iran and the Fisheries Support Unit (***FSU***) based at Oman. These two agencies play a special role in fostering close cooperation in their respective areas.
6. The Chair of IORA is on a rotational basis for a 2 year duration. Indonesia is the current Chair (since 2015) and South Africa will assume the Chairmanship post the Summit. India was the Chair from 2011-2013.

Successful Endeavours of IORA:

7. The specialized mechanisms of the IORA created for the benefit of Member States include:

- ***IORA Special Fund:*** The First Meeting of the IORA High Level Task Force (HLTF) held in October 2001 in Sri Lanka mooted the concept of an IORA Special Fund as a financial mechanism for supporting and complementing the funding of projects and programmes adopted by the Association, 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. Accordingly, the Special Fund was established in 2006 at the 6th Council of Ministers in Tehran and is being successfully utilized since.
- ***IORA Sustainable Development Programme:*** In 2014, the “IORA Sustainable Development Programme” (ISDP) was developed 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.
- ***IORA Specialized Agencies:*** There are currently two Specialized Agencies affiliated with the IORA through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) -- the Regional Centre for Science and Technology Transfer (RCSTT) headquartered in Iran and the Fisheries Support Unit (FSU) headquartered in Oman. These two Specialized Agencies have immensely benefited IORA by hosting various workshops/activities, resulting in capacity building and knowledge sharing.
- ***Chair of Indian Ocean Studies:*** The IORA Chair in Indian Ocean Studies (CIOS) was revived in 2014 after a gap of almost 15 years. The CIOS is ***jointly sponsored by India and Mauritius***. The present CIOS (Prof Atri) is from India. The work of the Chair literally started from scratch. The CIOS' primary task is to play a bridging role in fostering research activities and studies in IORA priority areas with other academic institutions of IORA Member States. Prof. Atri has been successful in forging linkages with Universities across different IORA countries and has delivered lectures on strengthening regionalism, especially in the economic and commercial sector. He has also been conducting studies on

trade facilitation initiatives in IORA and has conducted a workshop in collaboration with UNECA. Encouraging capacity building is an important area in his work. Two other important projects he is currently implementing are the publication of an online Journal of Indian Ocean Rim Studies and editing a Handbook on the Blue Economy, to be published by South Africa.

8. Apart from a multitude of initiatives ranging from workshops to training programmes to conferences, *the IORA today has four ministerial levels of specialized engagement – Trade, Blue Economy, Renewable Energy and Tourism*. A few notable events are:
 - The first ever IORA Ministerial Conference – the Economic and Business Conference (EBC-I) – was held in Mauritius on 4-5 July 2013, co-hosted by Mauritius and India (then Chair) with a thrust on trade and investment.
 - The 1st IORA Ministerial Forum in Renewable Energy was hosted by the United Arab Emirates on 21 Jan 2014.
 - The 1st IORA Tourism Ministerial Meeting was held in Seychelles on 21 Nov 2014.
 - The 1st IORA Ministerial Blue Economy Conference was convened at Mauritius on September 2-3, 2015
9. The success of all these conferences has been continued through various follow-up conferences/meetings as well as spin-offs resulting in projects. This year itself, the 2nd Ministerial Economic and Business Conference (EBC-II) was held in the United Arab Emirates on 11-13 April 2016. An outcome of this meeting was the requirement for an MoU for cooperation in the SME sector. MEA along with the MSME conducted a workshop to draft the MOU from January 19-20, 2017 in New Delhi. The draft has already been circulated to all member states for further comments.
10. The IORA has also pursued its efforts to engage its seven Dialogue Partner States in its priority sectors. At the recent COM held in Bali, there was a separate session dedicated to interaction of Member States with Dialogue Partners.

11. China hosted the Second Blue Economy Core Group Workshop (“Maritime Connectivity and Financing for Development in the Indian Ocean Rim”) on July 13-14, 2016. Earlier, Japan and Germany had hosted events on the Indian Ocean, namely the “International Symposium on IORA and Japan” on 20 Mar 2014 in Tokyo, and the “International Conference on the Indian Ocean - A Maritime Region on the Rise”, in Berlin on 9 June 2015 respectively.
12. With a view to broaden its scope, the IORA has been actively interacting with other international/regional organizations and has obtained Observer Status at the following organizations:
 - (a) United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD): Observer status acquired at the UNCTAD’s 61st session held on September 26, 2014.
 - (b) African Union (AU): Observer status acquired in Nov 2015. The Secretariat is in the process of finalizing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with it.
 - (c) United Nations General Assembly (UNGA): The General Assembly unanimously approved Resolution A/RES/70/123 for IORA Observer status on Dec 14, 2015.

India and IORA:

13. The year 2011 marked a turning point for the IORA when India took over as Chair of the organization. A major revitalization, in keeping with the emerging geo-strategic challenges that confronted the Indian Ocean region commenced, with re-formulation of IORA priorities taking center-stage.
14. At the 11th COM Meeting in Bengaluru in November 2011, ***six priority areas*** were identified on the basis of an Indian proposal to focus cooperation amongst member states of IORA in the years to come. These include the following:-
 - (a) Maritime Safety and Security
 - (b) Trade and Investment Facilitation
 - (c) Fisheries Management
 - (d) Disaster Risk Management

- (e) Academic, Science and Technology
- (f) Tourism and Cultural Exchange

15. The six “Priority Sectors” resulted in clearly defining the way forward for the organization and focusing the efforts along these priority areas. This was followed by the decision of the other three G-20 countries- Australia, Indonesia and South Africa deciding to take leadership roles as succeeding Chairs of IORA.

16. Prime Minister of India remarked during his visit to Mauritius on March 12, 2015, “Our Indian Ocean Rim Association can be an important instrument for pursuing our vision for a sustainable and prosperous future in the region.... We often define regional groupings around landmass. The time has come for a strong grouping around the Indian Ocean. We will pursue this with new vigor in the years ahead.... We seek a future for Indian Ocean that lives up to the name of **SAGAR** – Security and Growth for All in the Region.”

17. India’s vision for the organisation was outlined by the Minister of State for External Affairs Gen (retd) Dr. VK Singh during the 15th COM meeting at Padang, Indonesia on 23 October 2015. He stated that India will adopt a ten point approach between the 15th IORA Ministerial until the next Ministerial in Indonesia. The 10 proposals which India agreed to examine for feasibility included:-

- (i) Working closely with Mauritius and other IORA partners to set up an IORA virtual university with an aim to launch it in 2017 when IORA marks its 20th Anniversary. This initiative has now been on hold for the last one year.
- (ii) To offer capacity-building programmes to scientists from IORA partners at the Indian National Centre on Ocean Information Services in Hyderabad. Remote Sensing and Potential Fishing Zones (PFZ), Ocean Data Processing and Applications, Ocean Climate Modelling, Standard Operating Procedure for Tsunami Warning and Emergency Response are some of the broad themes addressed through these training programmes. We had circulated flyers on the courses on offer by Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), Hyderabad during the CSO meet at Yogyakarta, Indonesia on May 22-24, 2016 to solicit participation from member countries.

- (iii) Offer of a Special Training Course for IORA Diplomats at the Foreign Service Institute in New Delhi. Some of the IORA members are already availing of special training courses at FSI, we offered 5 vacancies to IORA member states in the special training course commencing May 2016. One participant each from Bangladesh, Comoros and Seychelles attended the course.
- (iv) Organising workshops on Women's Empowerment in 2016. We have decided to combine it with Ser (e) to optimise the utilisation of the resources.
- (v) Organising workshop on Skill Development of Youths in India. We have now combined the two events to optimise the utilisation of the resources.
- (vi) Committed to strengthen IORA Secretariat India has seconded Ms Ruchika Rishi to the IORA Secretariat at Mauritius since May 2017. She has now been re-designated as a Director.
- (vii) India has also completed its commitment to provision office equipment including 6 laptops, two desktops, Volume Licences and a photocopying machine to the IORA Secretariat.
- (viii) Institutionalizing of the Blue Economy Dialogue and its 2nd edition in India on November 4, 2016. India had organised the 1st edition of this event at Goa in August 2016. Five major themes were examined during the first Dialogue; viz. (1) Developing a Comprehensive Accounting Framework for Blue Economy (2) Fisheries and Aquaculture (3) Renewable Ocean Energy (4) Ports, Shipping, Manufacturing and Other Sectors (5) Sea-bed Exploration and Minerals. The 2nd edition of the Dialogue was organised by RIS in New Delhi on November 4-5, 2016. RIS is working towards the finalisation of an outcome document which will outline an action plan to further the Blue Economy dialogue at the forthcoming Ministerial on Blue Economy at Mauritius and the Leaders' Summit scheduled in March 2017.
- (ix) Hosting the second round of Experts Meeting on Maritime Safety and Security in order to facilitate further exchange of views on this

IORA priority area. India had hosted the 1st round of the Experts meeting at New Delhi from 13-14 October 2015 with the National Maritime Foundation piloting the event.

(x) India has also processed its Contribution of USD 100,000/- for the IORA Special Fund. India is the highest contributor to the IORA Special fund and this was largely acknowledged by Member States in the COM at Bali, Indonesia. However, India has not used the Special fund for any project. At the 16th COM in Bali, three cases were progressed for funding through the IORA Special fund – namely the:-

- (i) Women Entrepreneurship and Skill Development Workshop with FICCI.
- (ii) Innovation Exposition in collaboration with FICCI.
- (iii) Water Security and Sustainability conference with CII.

18. In July 2016, IORA featured in the Joint Statement between President of South Africa and Prime Minister of India on the occasion of the official visit of the Indian Prime Minister to South Africa. President Zuma noted that IORA gained new momentum with India as Chair (2011-12) and committed that it will be South Africa's objective to ensure that this momentum is sustained during its incoming Chairpersonship (2017-18). Both leaders noted the importance of the Ocean Economy, growing interest by other countries to join the organization as dialogue partners, and the strategic nature the Indian Ocean can play in developing the Region.

19. Indian Ocean Dialogue was launched as an Indian initiative. India hosted the first Indian Ocean Dialogue in Kochi, Kerala from September 5-7, 2015 as a Track 1.5 event bringing together Official, Academics and other Strategic thinkers. The participants discussed six broad themes—the geopolitical contours of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), maritime security challenges, strengthening regional institutions, information sharing, cooperation in disaster relief and management, and economic cooperation. Kochi Consensus was adopted as the outcome document of the First Indian Ocean Dialogue.

Initiatives by India:

20. There has been a view from certain Member States that India should take a more dominant role in the IORA. After the formation of the IOR Division, India has initiated several projects / conferences in order to resurrect India's image and take on a more lead position in the IORA. In consonance with the strategic vision of the Prime Minister of India for engagement in the Indian Ocean Region and to support India's larger role in IORA, the following initiatives are under process:

(i) The 2nd Blue Economy Dialogue in New Delhi which was conducted by RIS from November 4-5, 2016. This dialogue was aimed to be different from the first (held in Goa in Aug 2015), and an attempt to engage the Member States more strongly. The outcome document will provide inputs for discussion during the IORA Blue Economy Ministerial meet in Mauritius in May 2017.

(ii) An 'Indian Ocean Seminar' was organised at the India International Centre, New Delhi by Ambassador Yogendra Kumar on November 19, 2016. The event was Webcast to facilitate participation from all the IORA member states remotely. This was the first time that such a Webcast was tried out at any event in IORA.

(iii) The 4th International Relations Conference (IRC) of Symbiosis International University titled "India and the Indian Ocean: Sustainability, Security and Development" was organised from December 18-19, 2016 at Symbiosis Campus at Pune. The conference was attended by Ministers, diplomats, academicians from various IORA countries.

(iv) A Small and Medium Enterprises workshop to draft an MOU on cooperation in the SME sector for IORA countries was conducted from January 19-20, 2017. The workshop saw wide participation from member states and the resultant draft MoU has been recirculated for final comments to the headquarters of all Member States. The IORA Secretary General and member states acknowledged that this was the first such attempt at MoU and congratulated India (MEA/MSME) for the initiative.

(v) The Second Meeting of Experts on Maritime Safety and Security is being scheduled in early 2017 and will be coordinated by IDSA. The first meeting of experts was hosted by National Maritime Foundation (NMF)

from August 20-21, 2016 at Goa. India has been persistently bringing the focus on Maritime Safety and Security, which had been missing in IORA.

(vi) Ministerial level meet of Renewable Energy Ministers from IORA countries organised by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy. MNRE has committed to hold the meet alongside the ISA-Renewable Energy Invest Meet. The ISA was initially planned from February 15-17, 2017 at Ahmadabad, Gujarat but is now likely to take place somewhere in mid 2017.

(vii) Journalists / Media personnel workshop organised by XP Division aimed to expose them to India's role and potential in IORA. It will also expose them to the strengths of the Democratic system, Private sector, Think tanks and update their image of India. The group will also witness India's capacities in Civil and developmental uses of Space technology and also the Information Technology sector. Both of these would help to expand India's imprint within the IORA countries in these sectors. The programme has already been worked out jointly by IOR and XP division.

(viii) A workshop for twenty Parliamentarians (one from each IORA member country) is being planned for May 2017. Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training (BPST) has been asked to do a costing for the programme. It is proposed to conduct this programme on a 3 year basis thereafter.

(ix) A workshop for Women's Empowerment and Skill Development will be organised with the support of Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) in New Delhi. It is proposed to fund (50%) this workshop from the IORA Special Fund.

(x) A workshop on Water Security and Sustainability will be organised by Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). The workshop is oriented to capacity building in the IORA member states. This project is planned to be funded (50%) by the IORA Special fund.

(xi) Organising an Innovation Exposition for IORA member states in collaboration with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). This too is proposed to be funded (50%) from the IORA special fund.

Summary

21. In spite of being the major regional association, IORA has not been able to achieve major traction over the past two decades of its existence. India has been hailed for its stewardship to steer the path by defining the six priority areas of IORA during its chairmanship from 2011-2013.
22. India has once again taken the lead to resurrect the role of IORA in the region. To achieve this, India has taken on a lead role and set forth major initiatives across all the priority areas and also areas of concern for the IORA member states. India has taken a pivotal role in the association in tandem with the PM's strategic vision for engagements in the IOR as defined by **SAGAR** – Security and Growth for All in the Region.
23. All the initiatives piloted by India have been appreciated by the IORA secretariat as well as the Member States during the last Council of Ministers meet. All the initiatives have been well thought out and spread over the entire year and have gained significant traction. Four of the initiatives, namely the Blue Economy Dialogue, the Indian Ocean Seminar, The International Relations Council conference and the Workshop to draft an MoU for cooperation in the SME sector have already been completed and have been heralded as significant successful events of IORA.
24. The reflection of this dedication and commitment to IORA at the first Leader's Summit on March 7, 2017 will signal India's pivotal role in IORA.
