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**Institute of Social and
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India and the Indian Ocean

Renewing the Maritime Trade & Civilisational Linkages



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Conference on India and the Indian Ocean

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- Historically, the Indian Ocean has played a pre-eminent role in the global maritime architecture. The resurgence of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) is critical, given the region's economic dynamism, huge markets and rich natural resources.
- The growing geo-strategic and geo-economic salience of the IORA makes it evidently clear that there should be greater regional collaboration among the stakeholders to effectively address and confront non-traditional security threats such as maritime terrorism and piracy; trans-national crimes; and environmental & natural disasters.
- With the potential to become a significant overarching multilateral mechanism, meetings of IORA should be elevated to Heads of State/Government level, which should be convened preferably ahead of COP 21 to discuss a common climate change agenda.

History and Culture

- Creating awareness and understanding of the vibrant and multi-dimensional historical links among the peoples of the Indian Ocean region assume greater importance in the contemporary world. It can help in deepening regional cooperation and integration.
- It is useful for experts from history and culture to work closely with their counterparts from fields such as trade, technology and investment for pragmatic management of our contemporary challenges. A policy at the regional and national levels of cultural exchanges and interactions should be formulated and put in place.
- India's ancient Cotton Route needs due attention. In the pre-industrial revolution phase India clothed the world. Cotton reaches out across social and economic hierarchies. The Cotton Route concept should be leveraged to rekindle the historical maritime trade linkages around the Indian Ocean Rim. The understanding and interpretation should be shared across the member states for possible convergence on a way forward.

Cooperation for Energy Security

- Today, the Indian Ocean Region can best be described as a region of cooperative complexities, given that emerging security-related challenges have tended to complicate regional economic prosperity. For the Indian Ocean Rim gaining a new salience amidst the region's role in shaping global economic integration, the shifting distribution of power among the major actors and the increasing political volatility in the Rim have to be carefully analysed and addressed.
- The Indian Ocean presents itself as a vital transit route among the countries from Asia, the Pacific, Africa, and Europe, with vast cargo traffic passing through the region. The world's most important oil and gas routes traverse the Indian Ocean, with roughly 55 per cent of known oil reserves and 40 per

cent of gas reserves. This makes it imperative to ensure safety of Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs).

- Major intra-regional cooperation to encourage capacity-building and to deal with maritime security threats, most significantly terrorism and piracy is urgent. There are enough intra-regional capabilities available which should be leveraged for collective gains.
- Member states should explore cooperation in the area of renewable energy.

Strategic Issues

- The Indian Ocean Region occupies a central position in the global strategic landscape. Though there is no central narrative on geo-politics in the Indian Ocean Rim, institutional cooperation may facilitate the process. The changing security environment of the Rim reflects the interrelated geopolitical dynamics of different regional subsystems comprising *the continental-maritime interface* defining the Rim. These encompass an inter-regional strategic landscape spanning the Rim perimeter from the African and West Asian littorals and hinterland of the western ocean into its eastern rim extending into the Indo-Pacific. India, along with other countries in the region, has a pivotal role and responsibility in this regard.
- The relationship between sea and human being is very complex. Regulation of human behaviour for preventing calamity and disaster should be collectively addressed by strengthening cooperative institutional mechanisms.
- Maritime disputes pose challenges to stability and peace but a legal and technical approach may help in resolving some of these. However, the importance of political reconciliation cannot be over-emphasised.
- There is a need to coordinate the activities of Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and IORA.

Trade and Economic Cooperation

- For nations in the region to facilitate maritime commerce and economic activities at sea, ensuring security and protection of maritime domains comes in as an essential pre-requisite, which calls for effective coordination between regional and extra-regional players at the sub-regional, regional and trans-regional levels.
- Given the need for greater economic viability, in terms of mobilising resources from the IOR, and enhancing financial credibility of the grouping, a regular Summit Level Dialogue is required. This is primarily because all regional stakeholders can pitch in their capacities whilst a common cooperative framework is formulated for greater economic cooperation and prosperity in the IOR.
- The trade and investment committee of IORA may consider forming a sub-committee on non-tariff barriers (NTBs), as NTBs have emerged as a major area of concern.
- Policies related to FDI and technology transfers need to be revisited in the context of regional cooperation. Measures are required for promoting Greenfield investment.
- For IORA, in an open regional framework, trade facilitation becomes key to B2B contacts. Doing Business Index can be developed for countries in the region.
- There is a need to establish an IORA Chambers of Commerce and Industry. Initially, it can be based at IORA's Secretariat.
- Science and Technology (S&T) and support for small and medium enterprises should be given due priority for advancement of Blue Economy. In addition, regional value chains and other mechanisms may be promoted for regional economic integration.
- Special and differential treatment needs to be provided for small, developing and least developed countries.

- With expanding trade in knowledge-intensive goods and services, the region needs to work out a comprehensive strategy for intellectual property rights for which a joint committee on science and technology-transfer may also be considered.

Sectoral Cooperation

- IORA special fund may be used to support key sectoral projects.
- IOR is a biodiversity-rich region. Institutional measures may be initiated for conservation and sustainable utilisation of biological resources including medicinal plants, in accordance with global agreements like Nagoya Protocol.
- Energy Security, especially stockpiling of crude oil as an intervention, may be explored, whereby India and other countries may share facilities and technology in storing hydrocarbons.

With the proposed move to an apex configuration, the IORA Secretariat may be empowered to undertake new areas of sectoral cooperation based on regional requirements. An action plan, involving regional institutions, may be evolved to coordinate better between IORA and regional specificities.