



India as an Observer at IOC

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Why in News

India has been accepted as an **observer of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC)**.

India's joining of the IOC as an observer has **strategic importance** as the Commission is an important regional institution in the **Western/African Indian Ocean**.



Indian Ocean Commission

- The Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) is an **intergovernmental** body created in **1984 to protect the interests of the Western Indian Ocean islands**.
- It consists of **Madagascar, Comoros, La Réunion (French overseas territory), Mauritius and Seychelles**.
- The Commission has **five observers** — **India, China, European Union (EU), Malta and International Organisation of La Francophonie (OIF)**.
OIF is a 54 french speaking nations collective.

Significance of an Observer Status of India

- **Engagement with the Western Indian Ocean:**
 - It will facilitate **collective engagement with the islands** in the Western Indian Ocean that are becoming strategically significant.
 - Given China's growing presence in the region, **India will be able to increase its naval presence** and gain support for its maritime projects across the **Indo-Pacific**.
 - The Western Indian Ocean (WIO) is also a strategic location of the **Indian Ocean linking the Southeastern coast of Africa to the wider Indian Ocean and beyond**.
- **Opportunity in the Mozambique Channel:**
 - The IOC islands are situated around one of the key **chokepoints** in the **Indian Ocean- the Mozambique Channel**.
 - The Mozambique Channel is an arm of the Indian Ocean located between the African countries of Madagascar and Mozambique.
 - The Mozambique Channel **lost its significance** post the **opening of the Suez Canal**, but the **recent hostilities near the Strait of Hormuz** brought the channel back into focus as the original route for bigger commercial vessels (especially for oil tankers).
 - **Potential of natural gas reserves in the Mozambique Channel** further increases the significance of the region.
- **Cooperation with France:**
 - It will also help to boost **cooperation with France** that has a strong presence in the western Indian ocean.
- **SAGAR Policy:**
 - It will help to extend **India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for all in the Region) policy** in the region.
 - SAGAR is an articulation of India's vision for the Indian Ocean which aims for enhancement of capacities to safeguard land and maritime territories & interests; deepening economic and security cooperation in the littoral; action to deal with natural disasters and maritime threats like piracy, terrorism.

Source: TH