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News: MAHASAGAR Initiative

- Recently, the **first session of MAHASAGAR, the Indian Navy's initiative, brought together maritime leaders from diverse nations within the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).** Theme of the initiative is “Collective Maritime Approach towards Countering Common Challenges”.
- MAHASAGAR stands for **Maritime Heads for Active Security And Growth for All in the Region.**
- It aims to **create a platform for high-level interactions fostering cooperation among IOR nations.**

Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)

- Indian Ocean Rim Association is an **international organization** consisting of **23 states bordering Indian Ocean.**
- Established on 07th March 1997, IORA has its Headquarters in **Ebene, Mauritius.**
- Members of the organisation are Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros, **France,** India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Somalia, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, UAE, and Yemen.

- Dialogue Partners are China, Egypt, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK, US, Turkey, and South Korea.
- France became the 23rd member in December 2020 to join. This is **probably the first time that a country whose mainland is not on the Indian Ocean has been brought into the fold of the IORA**. France applied for membership citing its **overseas territory of Réunion Island in the western Indian Ocean**.
- France first joined IORA as a dialogue partner in 2001, just four years after the association was formed.
- Since **all decisions in IORA are taken by consensus**, objection from even a single country stops a process.
- The membership is open to **“sovereign states of the Indian Ocean Rim willing to subscribe to the principles and objectives of the Charter”**.

Indian Ocean Commission (IOC)

- Indian Ocean Commission is an **intergovernmental organization that Links African Indian Ocean Nations**.
- It is the **only regional organisation in Africa comprised exclusively of Islands**.
- IOC was formed in 1982 at Mauritius and was institutionalized in 1984 by **Victoria Agreement in Seychelles**.

- The Commission has a **Secretariat which is in Mauritius** and headed by a Secretary General.
- Members: **Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Reunion (an overseas region of France) and Seychelles.**
- Observers: China, **India**, Japan, Sovereign Order of Malta, European Union, and Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie.

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.