

INDIA JOINS INDIAN OCEAN COMMISSION AS OBSERVER

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: IOR-ARC and India

India has been approved as an observer state for a five-nation grouping in the Western Indian Ocean, which includes Madagascar, Comoros, Seychelles, Mauritius and French Reunion.

The members of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) decided on India's application at a meeting last week, officials said. With the decision, India will join China, which was made an observer in 2016, as well as the "International Organisation of the Francophonie" or the 54-nation French-speaking collective, the European Union (EU) and Malta, which were all admitted in 2017.

The decision to join the IOC marks a part of the government's push for greater salience in the whole Indian Ocean Region (IOR), including what is called the Western or African Indian Ocean. In December 2019, the Ministry of External Affairs decided to include Madagascar, Comoros and Reunion as part of the IOR (Indian Ocean Region) desk along with Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius and Seychelles. Subsequently, they have been incorporated into one single division under the additional Secretary (Indo-Pacific) Neena Malhotra.

The IOC is also significant for its geographical location, as the islands sit around a "key choke-point" in the Indian Ocean — the Mozambique Channel. This channel is being watched more closely as the U.S.-Iran tensions threaten the Strait of Hormuz. Given China's growing presence in the region, India hopes to increase its naval presence and gain support for its maritime projects across the Indo-Pacific, beginning at East African shores.

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