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China holds its first meeting with 19 countries in Indian Ocean region without India

The Chinese forum apparently is aimed at countering India's strong influence in the Indian Ocean region where India-backed organisations like the Indian Ocean Rim Association, (IORA), which has a membership of 23 countries have taken strong roots.

By: [PTI](#)

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Last year, China held a meeting with some South Asian countries on COVID-19 vaccine cooperation without the participation of India. (Representational)

China held a meeting this week with 19 countries from the Indian Ocean region in which India was conspicuously absent.

The China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA), an organisation connected with the Chinese Foreign Ministry held a meeting of the China-Indian Ocean Region Forum on Development Cooperation on November 21, in which 19 countries took part, according to a press release issued by the organisation.

The meeting was held in a hybrid manner under the theme of “Shared Development: Theory and Practice from the Perspective of the Blue Economy” in Kunming, Yunnan Province, it said.

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Representatives of 19 countries, including Indonesia, Pakistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, Afghanistan, Iran, Oman, South Africa, Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius, Djibouti, Australia and representatives of 3 international organisations were present, it said.

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India was reportedly not invited, according to informed sources here.

Last year, China held a meeting with some South Asian countries on COVID-19 vaccine cooperation without the participation of India.

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CIDCA is headed by Luo Zhaohui, the former Vice Foreign Minister and Ambassador to India.

According to the official website of the organisation, he is the Secretary of the CPC (the ruling Communist Party of China) Leadership Group of CIDCA.

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CIDCA's official website said the aims of the organisation is to formulate strategic guidelines, plans and policies for foreign aid, coordinate and offer advice on major foreign aid issues, advance the country's reforms in matters involving foreign aid, and identify major programmes, supervise and evaluate their implementation.

During his tour of Sri Lanka in January this year, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi proposed to establish a "forum on the development of Indian Ocean Island Countries." When asked whether the CIDCA meeting is the same that is proposed by Wang, the Chinese Foreign Ministry here has clarified to the media that the November 21 meeting was not part of it.

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At the November 21 meeting, China has proposed to establish a marine disaster prevention and mitigation cooperation mechanism between China and countries in the Indian Ocean region, the CIDCA press release said.

China is ready to provide necessary financial, material, and technical support to countries in need, it said.

China is vying for influence in the strategic Indian Ocean region with substantial investments in ports and infrastructure investments in several countries, including Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

While China has established a full-fledged naval base in Djibouti, its first outside the country, Beijing has acquired the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka on a 99-year

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lease besides building the port at Pakistan's Gwadar in the Arabian Sea opposite India's western coast besides infrastructure investments in the Maldives.

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The Chinese forum apparently is aimed at countering India's strong influence in the Indian Ocean region where India-backed organisations like the Indian Ocean Rim Association, (IORA), which has a membership of 23 countries have taken strong roots.

China is a dialogue partner in the IORA formed in 1997.

IORA became an observer to the UN General Assembly and the African Union in 2015.

Besides the IORA, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has proposed "Security and Growth for All in the Region" (SAGAR) in 2015 for active cooperation among the littoral countries of the Indian Ocean region.

The Indian Navy-backed 'Indian Ocean Naval Symposium' (IONS) seeks to increase maritime cooperation among navies of the region.

Since the June 2020 Galwan Valley clash between Chinese and Indian armies, bilateral ties have been severely hit.

India has consistently maintained that peace and tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) are important for the overall development of bilateral relations with China.



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