INTRODUCTION

The Indian Ocean is a maritime link between the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. Geographically, the terrestrial aspect of this region includes the sea beds of Indian Ocean, the islands, the littoral countries, which are bordered by the Indian ocean and the hinterland region, which even though comprise land locked states, yet mirrors perceptible influences of any development in the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean touches the shores of thirty five states and their adjacent seas, bays and gulfs and can thus serve to unify the destiny of all those affected by it. In this study, an attempt has been made to examine the status of the resource base, economic development, their geopolitical and geo strategic importance of littoral and island states only. On the basis of the above said examination, an attempt is made to study the prospects of economic development and political integration of these states in personal capacity and also as regional personalities of the ‘Indian Ocean Rim countries’ belt.

The shape of the Indian Ocean along the littoral states is like a semi circle or rim. The rim is considered as a region. Here the region is not defined on purely geographical terms and does not include assumptions that go into the definition of a natural region. In fact, regionalism had been projected as a creative force. In defining the geography and the identity of a region, social and political influences are eliminated.
Since the 1960s academicians, especially those experts in international relations have sought to define regionalism as tool for regional cooperation and integration. Regionalism is not only based on geographical proximity but also on economic interdependence and common historical experience such as colonialism, political ideologies, geopolitical and cultural legacies. The major thrust of the regional organisation is to promote economic development through regional cooperation. However the formation of regional organisation has changed the nature of international politics and the world economy. But this work is not tilted towards the formation of any regional organisation. The effort has been given to the evaluation of status of economic development of the Indian Ocean Rim economies. Similarly, the words “political integration” do not signify the study of internal polity of any state, but it is about the cooperative framework among IOR states for economic development.

The study also further examined post-cold war regional discourses and consequent geopolitical configuration and significance of the IOR region and states.

The rationale of this study was to fulfil the need of a detailed diagnostic investigation and evaluation of the spatial patterns of level of economic development. This would enable us to understand the scope of meaningful regional cooperation and its advancement in proper perspective, devoid of any negative connotation. Here it will be better to mention that regionalism that interest us is not in the form of a discriminatory free trade area, but involved collective economic cooperation within the conceptual framework. The
understanding of complex interaction among IOR economies over time and space, which the study has sought to evolve, would go as vital ingredient in the development of true prospective and sound policy making. Inspite of the region, being richly endowed with resources, there are glaring imbalances in the level and speed of economic development, with fast, high level development limited to few economies and sluggish low level development, a common malaise of the IOR region. Hence a comprehensive study of the regional imbalances would simplify the task of pinpointing the constraints to growth and development, to be soon eliminated. Economic development has to be visualized on temporal and spatial scales, if a more rapid and universal economic development is to be targeted. The analysis of this work is, therefore, attempted for the period 1990s and country is the unit of study. Such an analysis would facilitate an examination and explanations of intercountry differences in the trajectory of economic development in the IOR nations.

After the demise of colonialism many books, papers and articles have been devoted to the IOR region, but they seem to be piecemeal, restricted in their approach and comprehensiveness, with only a treatment of either an individual country or a segment of a country. They are also not updated on a temporal scale, failing to mirror the recent influences of globalization and liberalization.

Therefore, the present work, it is hoped, would provide a comprehensive picture of economic development for the whole IOR, and
would make the task easy to examine the inter-country differentials in levels of economic development. The objectives of this study have been achieved by logical arranging of following chapters.

*Chapter first* outlines in detail the general geographical setting and Structure: such as geological structure and physiography. These in their own way shape the natural resource landscape, and are of great importance to land-use studies and for the assessment of economic development potential.

*Chapter second* attempts to examine the potential reserve and production of different types of resources. They are influencing the levels and directions of economic development. *Chapter third* is oriented exclusively towards major set of problems and issues faced by the IOR economies. The focus is on development problems like poverty, inequality, unemployment, health and economic performance by the different sectors.

*Chapter fourth* focuses on a wide range of developing countries not only in their capacity as independent nation states but also in relations to one another and in their interaction with rich nations, both capitalist and socialist. The major tool of interaction is the trade and investment.

*Chapter fifth*, recognised the necessity of treating the problems of development and underdevelopment from an institutional perspective. The focus has been given on the emergence of regional cooperation organisation (IOR-ARC) for the solution of economic problems.

*Chapter sixth*, focuses on the contemporary geopolitics of the region. The geopolitical scenario of the region is highlighted from different angles. In
this chapter, the major focus had been given on pipeline and boundary geopolitics.

The study is primarily based on secondary sources and official documents that enabled an examination of the assessment of resources, economic development and regional trade direction and magnitude. For the calculation of data, illustration of graphs and maps simple statistical and cartographic techniques have been used. They give a comprehensive picture of the challenges being faced during the economic development, particularly since the liberalization of the world economy. To supplement these chapters well-designed maps, interspersed throughout the work, give more clear visual perspective on many significant conditions and trends of economic development. Most of the data are collected from the UN publications and official documents of IOR economies. Therefore some inconsistency and distortions have crept in some part of the description. Inspite of these deficiencies, differences between nations are so big that even indicators of national welfare as crude as infant mortality rates, whole derived from currently available data can serve as useful guides to the size of the required gains and also serve as qualitative measures of economic development. Of course, the long-run rate of development is the most important in the discussion, since our definition of economic development hinge upon the behaviour of time quantity.

An adequate criterion of economic development is not easy to construct. There are vast disparities in natural endowments, economic
structure, cultural heritage and social and political institutions that exist in
different regions of the world today are likely to invalidate any attempt to
devise a single criterion for distinguishing level of economic development of
one nation from another, but according to the current definitional approaches
some important indicators for economic development are selected for inter
country comparisons and satisfactory result.

On the whole, the main objective of this study has been an empirical
identification and evaluation of regional differences in the patterns and
dynamics of economic development in the IOR nations, during the period i.e.,
1990-2000. During this period, the overall development scenario has greatly
improved, but the pursuance of over all development efforts has not been
interwoven with sound regional strategies, and such regional imbalances have
become more pronounced in recent years, especially since liberalization and
structural change of the world economy.

Hopefully, such an arrangement will ease the task of planners,
administrators diplomats and politicians, who in one way or the other are
interested in understanding the problems of economic development in the IOR
region. Moreover, this approach is essential to know the real problems of the
region. The key aspect is that the IOR belongs to no single nation. The
responsibilities of IOR economic policy leadership are bound to be developed
as shared responsibilities. It is a huge and rewarding task of establishing a
degree of intimacy among the heterogeneous nations of the Indian Ocean Rim
upon which confident policy strategies can be promulgated and executed in
support of international systemic objective.