

INDIA BLOCKS PAK ENTRY INTO Indian Ocean grouping ✓

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MUSCAT, Jan. 22. — India blocked Pakistan's attempt to become a member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IORARC) as foreign ministers of the inter-continental grouping began their two-day extraordinary meeting here today.

Islamabad's application for membership was taken up by the committee of officials from member-countries at their meeting last night.

Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia and Kenya strongly supported Pakistan's case and wanted that it be made a member without delay, sources said. But Mr Jaswant Singh objected, saying Islamabad had still not accorded the most favoured nation status to New Delhi and had, therefore, not complied with the principles of the grouping.

India's stand was supported by Sri Lanka and Mauritius.

Iran, however, thought India should take its

complaint against Pakistan to the World Trade Organisation. The Indonesian representative even doubted the veracity of India's claim that it was not being granted MFN status by Pakistan.

Australia, another important member, remained quiet.

In the early hours, it was decided that Pakistan would not be made a member.

The IORARC Charter supports the principle of global trade liberalisation consistent with WTO principles, and stands committed to the principle of non-discriminatory treatment to all member-countries in respect of the MFN status.

IORARC was born in Port Louis, Mauritius, in March 1997 with 14 countries including India as members. The grouping has four dialogue partners: Britain, China, Japan and Egypt. France, which applied for full membership, has been asked to apply for dialogue partner status — its shores are not washed by the Indian Ocean, and it, therefore, does not qualify.

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