

Text of Shri Nitin Gadkari's Address the Indian Ocean Conference in Singapore Today

His Excellency Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe (Hon'ble Prime Minister of Sri Lanka), Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan (Hon'ble Foreign Minister of Singapore), Shri M J Akbar (Hon'ble Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, India and my colleague in the Council of Ministers) and other dignitaries present in the audience from over 30 countries, Namaskar! I extend my best wishes to all of you on behalf of the Government of India.

At the outset, I wish to thank the organizers of this timely conference- India Foundation, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Singapore; Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) and Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Sri Lanka- for inviting me to be a part of this event.

With a coastline of 7500 km and 1200 island territories, India is and always has been a maritime nation. Our central location in the IOR (Indian Ocean Region) has connected us with other cultures, shaped our maritime trade routes and influenced India's strategic thought.

For example, Lothal in Gujarat was one of the earliest seaports in the world and our ancient Sanskrit texts refer to oceans as the storehouse of Chaturdashanam Ratnanam: the 14 gems. 90% of India's trade by volume and 90% of our oil imports are carried on the seas. India has also been a net provider of security and force for stability in the region. These three pillars of Culture, Commerce and Comity are also the central themes of this conference.

We live in a world where the strategic and economic pivots are shifting to make the Indo-Pacific generally and the IOR more specifically the centre stage of virtually every major power. However, while the attention of other countries on IOR is fairly recent, India has maintained trade and civilizational links with other countries in the region since time immemorial. These links were developed without recourse to military conquest, instead by people-to-people engagements.

For example, merchants and artisans who settled in these regions over millennia brought with them their cultural ethos and traditions. The host societies throughout the region accepted these visitors as their own and in turn, the fusion that arose saw the creation of amazing shared cultures that we can all be proud of, not bound by political boundaries or the monopoly of any single nation. Diversity and pluralism developed according to local genius over time.

There was considerable to-and-fro movement, so much so, that we are informed by the author and researcher Sanjeev Sanyal in his latest book, "The Ocean of Churn", that there was a period in the history of Tamil Nadu when the Pallava dynasty had succession problems. So they invited a prince from Cambodia to take-over their kingdom, reciprocating the gesture of an earlier Pallava prince who had gone to Cambodia, married a local Naga princess and established a dynasty.

This was the extent of acceptance and familiarity across geographical distances that we can only wonder about. The result was the emergence of extensive trading networks that led to economic prosperity and made our region attractive to outside powers that had less benign intentions.

The result was the unfortunate disruption of our links as imperial powers established their colonies and shifted the focus of our economies, our trading patterns and even our cultural discourse, away from each other to one directed towards the colonial powers. Our mutually beneficial economic and cultural networks got so extensively disrupted that they could not be fully re-established even after our countries got independence.

This needs to change so that countries of the region can become the masters of their fate once again, not dictated by superior military powers from outside. Rather we should strive to develop peace and harmony amongst all stakeholders based on rules that we have drawn up ourselves.

Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi says that Blue Chakra of India's national flag represents the potential of the Blue Economy and my Ministry is committed to realize its full potential.

We want to create a model of port-led development for India through the **Sagarmala Port Development Project** which will establish new ports and modernise old ones to link our coastal and island territories with the hinterland. The Sagarmala Project is based on four pillars:

- Optimising multi-modal transport to reduce cost of domestic cargo by leveraging inland waterways
- Minimizing time and cost of export-import cargo logistics
- Lowering costs for bulk industries by locating them closer to the coast
- Improving export competitiveness by locating discrete manufacturing clusters near ports

We have identified 173 projects under Sagarmala program with a total outlay of USD 60 billion under the following four archetypes:

- Port modernization
- Port connectivity improvement
- Port-led industrial development
- Coastal community development

We aim to complete all these projects by 2020. When completed, they will have created 10 million new jobs and increased our coastal shipping volumes by five times from the current levels of 60 million tonnes per annum. Most importantly Sagarmala Program will also save India close to USD 6 billion in logistics costs every year.

I have decided to benchmark performance of major ports to the best in category international ports and learn from international best practises. For example, our port in Haldia uses bio-diesel, while our ports in Tuticorn, Ennore and Chennai use solar and wind power which reduces logistics cost resulting in growth and jobs. As a result of all our efforts, I am happy to tell you that all ports and companies under Shipping Ministry are now in profits (net profit to be INR 3000 crore).

My government believes that our neighbourhood and the Indian Ocean littoral can be partners in India's growth story to fuel their own economic growth and bring sustainability to the IOR. Therefore, beyond the Sagarmala, we are also committed to building infrastructure in other littoral countries to create onward connectivity from India. We have established a Special Purpose Vehicle to take up maritime projects overseas. We have also signed a coastal shipping agreement with Bangladesh and are developing the Chahbahar port in Iran, which would act as the gateway to the world not only for Afghanistan but also for the Central Asian Republics.

India is currently going through a phase of rapid transformation under PM Modi's leadership and it is an exciting time to partner with us. Make in India, Smart Cities, Clean India, Skill India- these are all initiatives that can resonate and be replicated to varying degrees in littoral countries. We are offering our regional satellite navigation system NavIC to our neighbours, sharing capacity enhancement in digital space, linking centres of higher education and research across the SAARC countries and meeting growing demands for quality healthcare from surrounding regions.

These are all initiatives for stepping up India's growth story, and can very well be a vehicle for strengthening partnership in the region. None of us can grow in isolation, and building synergies has always been a win-win situation for all partners. Your development priorities will guide our engagement; not our perception of your needs.

Indic world view of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam- concept of whole world as a family - is perhaps most acutely experienced on oceans. As I explained earlier, the Indian Ocean has always been about diversity and pluralism, different cultures and civilizations, and political and economic systems that found ways to co-habit and complement each other through connectivity, trade and enhancement of synergies. Our government's Project Mausam is aimed at revisiting these ancient maritime routes and cultural links with other countries in the region.

Indian Ocean is critical to the future of the world. Its waters touch the shores of over 40 countries and nearly 40% of the world population. Two-thirds of the world's oil shipments and one-third of the bulk cargo cross the Indian Ocean. Our future cannot be a zero-sum game. IOR is our common maritime home and our vision for this region is best summarized in the Hon'ble Prime-Minister's phrase of SAGAR- Security and Growth for All in the Region.

India is committed to use our capabilities and central location in the region to ensure a safe, secure and stable Indian Ocean Region that takes us all to the shore of prosperity. Thank you.

NP/MS

(Release ID :149454)