

Two-day Regional Maritime Safety Conference 2019 begins in Mumbai

The Regional Maritime Safety Conference 2019, being organized by India for the first time, commenced in Mumbai today. The two-day conference will deliberate on issues related to assuring maritime safety in the India-ASEAN sub-region, safeguarding our shores and promoting maritime trade. The conference will address a range of issues that affect regional maritime safety, including transport safety, maritime law, ship building, transportation of hazardous goods, marine oil spill, pollution and environmental safety. The inaugural edition is being organized by the National Maritime Foundation (NMF), in coordination with Ministry of Shipping and Ministry of External Affairs.

Addressing the gathering, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Shipping, Shri Sanjay Bandopadhyay said that with the linking of domestic crude oil prices with prices of international crude, India is witnessing a growth in coastal shipping and inland waterways. Our ports have seen growth in movement of fertilizers, food grains, automotive, and other bulk materials. The number of seafarers grew by 35% in 2018 as compared to 2017; there has been a growth also in the blue economy which is related to the maritime sector, said Shri Bandopadhyay.

He said that maritime trade is very important for India, which has a coastline nearly 7,500 km long and that India has been engaging very actively with ASEAN countries in the maritime sector. He stated that the concept of Sagarmala – port-led development in the region – has given a special impetus to maritime trade and commerce.



The Additional Secretary said that along with growth, safety and security too needs to be ensured. He stated that sustainable development in shipping and ports is a challenge that needs to be addressed. He said that the introduction of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) low sulphur regulations for marine fuel oil, which comes into effect from January 1, 2020, is a challenge for the region. He informed that new regulations are being developed, and that the IMO Sub-Committee on Environment is deliberating on implementation of the regulations.

Joint Secretary, ASEAN, Ministry of External Affairs, Shri Anurag Bhushan said that India's relationship with ASEAN countries has gone a long way from a central partner in 1992 to summit partner. He said that the turnaround came in 2014 when Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi initiated the Act East Policy, whereby a policy underpinned by concrete actions and deliverables was adopted by both sides. He said that the partnership has blossomed on the all three pillars of polity and security, economy and sociocultural dimensions. The high point of the partnership was when India hosted all ten leaders of the ASEAN countries at the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit in New Delhi on January 25 – 26, 2018, stated the Joint Secretary. He said that various initiatives have been taken since then to further cooperation in maritime sector, centred largely on the blue economy. Two workshops on blue economy were held and the deliverables of the workshops were summarized in ten recommendations which have been submitted by India to the foreign ministers of the ten ASEAN countries, said Shri Bhushan. Three conferences on maritime security and cooperation have been held under the aegis of East Asia Summit as well. He expressed hope that the Maritime Safety Conference would be able to formulate recommendations and solutions for India, ASEAN countries and other participating countries to ensure a safer and cleaner maritime environment.



Chairman, National Maritime Foundation and Former Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral RK Dhowan, PVSM, AVSM, YSM (Retd.) said that globalization has resulted in vulnerability of the oceans; the Indian Ocean is the third largest water body of the world and countries on the rim of the ocean are home to nearly one-third of humanity. Noting that maritime trade and transportation has increased, the Chairman said that we need to track and hone the Safety of Life at Sea Convention, Voluntary IMO Member State Safety Audit Scheme (VIMSAS) and the III code of IMO. He said that there is a need for greater interaction between various constructs and structures in the region, such as SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region), Indian Ocean Rim Association, Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, ASEAN, East Asia Summit and Western Pacific Naval Symposium.

The Chairman underlined the importance of effective information-sharing arrangements in enhancing maritime domain awareness. He informed that India has created a significant network by linking up Automatic Identification System Network, Coastal Radar Stations and 51 stations of the Navy and the Coast Guard into Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC), set up by the Indian Navy in 2014. The Indian Navy has set up the Information Fusion Centre in 2018. Both these contribute significantly in improving maritime domain awareness, said Admiral Dhowan.

He added that India has entered into technical agreements with a large number of countries, including ASEAN countries, for exchange of white shipping information.



Stating that indiscriminate pollution of seas is turning extreme climatic conditions into natural disasters, the Chairman called for optimal utilization of resources for ensuring sustainable development of oceans. He said that the UN document, "Transforming our World – Agenda 2030" and Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG-14 provide a template for conservation of oceanic resources. Speaking on oil spills, the Chairman said that there is a need to harmonize the South Asia Seas Programme and East Asia Seas Programme; this is an avenue for cooperation between India and ASEAN, for improving maritime environment safety and thereby helping ensure clean and healthy oceans for future generations, said the Chairman. Expressing the need for sustainable fishing, he added that deep sea sustainable fishing, a focus area for National Fisheries Policy 2017, is another avenue for India – ASEAN cooperation.

The Chairman hoped that the conference will result in formulation of concrete action plans for India – ASEAN cooperation in advancing maritime safety in the region, which he said has emerged as a centre of economic and strategic development in the maritime domain.

Coast Guard Commander (Western Seaboard), ADG K. Natarajan, PTM, ATM said that the conference addresses key maritime issues which are vital for sustainable development of the India-ASEAN sub-region. He said that we need to collectively develop strategies for safe harnessing and conservation of oceans. Speaking of the importance of ecologically judicious exploitation of oceans and safe operations, the Commander made reference to UNCLOS 1982 and Coast Guard Act 1978.

The Coast Guard has been involved in ocean peace-keeping initiatives with international maritime agencies and information-sharing agreements in cooperation with countries in the region, said Shri Natarajan.



Informing that Coast Guard is the National Coordinating Agency for maritime search and rescue, the Commander said that the Coast Guard has established systems to augment its capabilities. With reduction in search component with advancement of technology, the rescue component has increased. The Indian Coast Guard has saved more than 10,000 lives, saving one precious life every second day, said the Commander.

The Commander recalled that India has played an active role in setting up information-sharing centres and in the functioning of the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP). He said that the cooperative framework has significantly reduced the threat of piracy and armed robbery in the region, paving the way for safer seas.

While focusing on the need for sustainable exploitation to prevent ecological imbalance, the Commander said that there is an urgent need to address regulations governing carriage of safety equipment by fisher-folk as preventive mechanism. Speaking of the threat of oil spills, he informed that the Indian Coast Guard has assumed the responsibility of Central Coordinating Authority for oil response in maritime zones of India. Under the National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan, the Coast Guard has both developed its own capability and has been guiding government agencies as well. The organization is also committed to regional cooperation. He said that the Government last year approved the signing of an MoU between India and South Asian Cooperative Environment

Programme (SACEP) and nominated Indian Coast Guard as the competent national authority and contact point for implementation of Regional Oil Spill Contingency Plan. He expressed the hope that the conference will lead to a strengthening of the regional cooperative mechanism for safe, secure and cleaner seas.

Director, National Maritime Foundation, Vice Admiral (Retd.) Shri Pradeep Chauhan welcomed the delegates to the conference.



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