



INDIA
भारत

Statement
by
Mr. MJ Akbar,
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External Affairs

at
Oceans Conference
“Our oceans, our future:
Partnering for the implementation of SDG 14”

8 June 2017

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

I am honoured to be addressing this Assembly on the World Oceans Day.

We thank Fiji and Sweden, the co-hosts of the Conference, and greatly appreciate the President of General Assembly for his leadership in mobilising support for this timely initiative.

It is encouraging to note that so many leaders are participating in this Conference.

Mr. President,

Both ancient philosophy and modern science assert water as both the source and sustenance of life. Prime Minister Narendra Modi merged metaphor with tradition when he said that the blue chakra, or wheel, at the centre of our Indian flag represent the potential of the Blue Revolution or Ocean Economy, emphasising the centrality of the ocean economy for India. Water, whether in lake, river or ocean, has offered a harvest for humankind in many dimensions, not least being the concourse of ideas, culture and partnerships across vast distances for civilisations. We believe that India Ocean has been perhaps the most powerful force for good in the geo-economics of world history. It can become the ocean of the 21st century, a free and secure pathway for trade and exchange of intellect, discourse, cuisine and culture that helps fashion a truly international harmony.

Mr. President,

India is familiar as a landmass. What we tend to overlook is that it also has over 7,500 km of coast and more than a thousand islands and is a seafaring nation with a large coastal economy. More than a third of the Indian population lives along the coast. India, one of the 'mega diverse' countries in terms of biodiversity, is the third largest producer of fish and second largest producer of inland fish. The Indian coastline has 12 major ports besides nearly 150 smaller ones and several large shipyards. More are being built even as we speak.

We are, therefore, acutely aware of the challenges and opportunities that Oceans represent: from sustainable fisheries to prevention and control of marine litter and plastic pollution, from affordable renewable energy to eco-tourism and early warning systems for disaster risk reduction and management, building resilience and adaptation to climate change.

India has an extensive institutional and legal architecture to manage the issues relating to oceans and coastal regulation. This includes several ministries and specialised institutions dealing with different aspects of ocean research and blue economy. The Prime Minister chairs the National Institution for Transforming India, NITI Aayog, the nodal agency for implementation of SDGs, including the SDG14. The Ministry of Earth Sciences, the National Institute of Oceanography and the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services, Centre for Marine Living Research and Ecology and the National Biodiversity Authority are some of the institutions doing pioneering work related to oceans. An Integrated Coastal and Marine Area Management Project is involved in monitoring sea water quality, shore protection measures, shoreline management, oil spill models through the

application of GIS, remote sensing and mathematical modelling for management of vulnerable habitats.

Mr. President,

Earlier this year, the historic first Summit of the Indian Ocean Rim Association in Jakarta recognised Blue Economy as a driver of inclusive and sustainable economic growth and development. As a follow up, last month we had fruitful discussions in Jakarta during the IORA Ministerial Conference on Financing the Blue Economy.

The rapid and sustained economic growth across oceans is proof that the world's economic engines are purring to a new tune in the 21st century. We must turn this into the harmony of a great choir, where each of us is an equal voice. The 21st century will be shaped by the principles of equality and sovereignty. Those who believe in discord have no place in a choir. The nations of oceans are often called small. We do not believe in small or big: every nation is sovereign. Capacities might vary, but all nations have equal rights.

Last November India launched an ambitious project called Sagarmala that focuses on port modernisation, connectivity and coastal community development involving more than 400 projects over the next two decades. This massive programme aims to promote port-led development in the country by harnessing India's 7,500-km long coastline and navigable waterways.

India is also working with our maritime neighbours to expand our cooperation on Blue Economy and maritime security. Last year India hosted the first Maritime India Summit, where Republic of Korea was our partner country and more than 40 countries participated.

Mr. President,

The human being is the acknowledged epitome of creation. Alas, he can also be the cause of his own woes. There is a perverse duality in men. We can destroy without feeling, or concern about consequence: the devastating impact of overfishing, habitat destruction, pollution and climate change are becoming increasingly clear.

In India, we recognise that the time for action is already long overdue. The national government has begun projects for massive rejuvenation of rivers, while citizens have risen to resurrect the waters. A clean-up operation of a Mumbai beach by the local community made international headlines recently. India is taking strong action to tackle the problem of plastic pollution. The National Green Tribunal, to take one example, has recently banned the use of disposable plastics in Delhi.

Mr. President,

The seas are both generous and equitable in their bounty. They feed the poorest of poor: The fishermen, who sustain their families and communities, serve humanity. They deserve to be at the core of any discussion, any action plan that we arrive at in these august gatherings. We must devise actionable means to improve their lives; to minimise the conflicts that arise from competition, and, most of all, end the exploitation that is often their fate. Our rules, regulations and laws must serve the impoverished first.

We cannot allow our seas to turn into zones of contention. An age of shared prosperity demands co-operation. Secure and open sea lanes are critical for peace, stability, prosperity and development. In this context, India reiterates the importance of freedom of navigation and overflight on the high seas, unimpeded lawful commerce, as well as resolving maritime disputes by peaceful means, in accordance with universally recognised principles of international law including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea – UNCLOS.

Mr. President,

Three decades ago, India was the first country to receive the status of a pioneer investor in the Indian Ocean. Indian scientists today collaborate in research stations on the Arctic Ocean studying its links with climate in our own region. Indian hydrographers partner in capacity building efforts with maritime neighbours. Indian institutions work closely with regional partners in improving early warning systems for tsunamis and cyclones. Indian naval ships are deployed in delivery of humanitarian assistance and emergency evacuation as also in patrolling sea-lanes against pirates.

India continues to expand its development partnership, especially with Small Island Developing States (SIDS). India has committed a sum of US\$ 500 million as grant-in-aid and US\$ 1 billion in soft loans for our SIDS partners over the next three years. In the last three years, the Government of India has contributed a sum of US\$ 75 million as grants for development partnership projects in SIDS partner countries. At the India-Pacific Islands Sustainable Development Conference in Fiji last month India announced its contribution of US\$ 1 million to assist the Fijian Presidency of COP 23 for climate change negotiations.

Today, I am pleased to announce the launch of a new India-UN Development Partnership Fund through which we will partner with a set of Pacific Island States in building early warning capacities for El Nino related extreme weather conditions.

Mr. President,

We welcome the First World Ocean Assessment and hope that it will strengthen the science-policy interface in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We must also work towards innovative technologies for offshore renewable energy, aquaculture, deep seabed mining and marine biotechnology are providing new source of jobs and competitive advantage. The need for 'greening' the ocean economy is also becoming clear with greater scientific understanding of oceans and earth sciences.

We welcome the comprehensive Call for Action being issued by this landmark conference. We are also happy to note the innovative mechanism of a registry for Voluntary Commitments. India is also engaging actively in this initiative.

India remains committed to sustainable development of its Blue Economy and building partnerships for the 2030 Agenda, including the SDG14.

India also believes that there cannot be sustainable development without sustainable engagement among blue nations. The framework for such sustainable engagement needs to be reinforced.

Mr. President,

Oceans and seas have played a vital role in human history. The health of oceans will determine the health of our planet. Can there be anything more important, or more urgent, than that?

Thank you.