

Speech of Dr. S. C. Jamir, Governor of Odisha on the Valedictory Session of the International Conference on "India & the Indian Ocean-Renewing the Maritime Trade & Civilisation Linkages" at Mayfair Convention, Bhubaneswar on 22.03.2015 at 02.00 P.M.

I am indeed delighted to be here for the valedictory session of the International Conference on "India & the Indian Ocean-Renewing the Maritime Trade & Civilisation Linkages" and address such an esteemed gathering of leading academic minds, international stakeholders and subject specialists gathered here for last two days to deliberate and reflect upon the key issue of maritime trade and civilization linkages in Indian Ocean. This conference couldn't have come at a better time than this one when it is being held on the close heels of the Hon'ble Prime Minister's recent visit to three countries in Indian Ocean Region - Seychelles, Mauritius and Sri Lanka. Hon'ble Prime Minister had repeatedly emphasized and said, "India, while defending its interests and safeguarding its mainland and islands, will equally work to 'ensure a safe, secure and stable' Indian Ocean Region." Further, Hon'ble Prime Minister's vision of Blue Economy which seeks to harness India's huge potential in maritime trade and cooperation may find right avenues in such deliberations. At this backdrop and development, the conference is seen as a timely one to further consolidate India's vision and attached importance on Indian Ocean Region for peace, security, trade and stability through maritime cooperation and collective action.

It is heartening to note that despite formidable challenge to deliberate on an area of such diversity and vastness, Institute of Social and Cultural Studies (ISCS) and the co-organiser of this international conference, Research and Information System of Developing Countries (RIS) have made significant attempts towards facilitating trade linkages and investment network, and fostering economic integration. I congratulate them for their thoughtful endeavour.

Before coming to modern dynamics that talks a lot on support and regional cooperation in Indian Ocean Region, I must say that regional cooperation in Indian Ocean has quite ancient foundations. For over 4,000 years, the Indian Ocean has been the centre of a thriving network of trade and people-to-people links which, for many centuries, gave the ocean and the region a distinct regional identity. The establishment of numerous colonies acted as catalyst for the rapid growth of trade and a network of maritime trade paths which linked the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean and the western edge of the Pacific. The Ocean also provided a crossroad in the 15th century what is known as the Spice Routes, dramatically changing trade patterns at the time and thrusting itself in the annals of world history. It is not an exaggeration to state that this magnificent ocean, with over 4,000 years of heritage in facilitating the exchange of goods and the movement of people, provided an early template to international maritime trade and facilitated the foundations of globalized trade long before there was even a description for it.

Trade was primarily instrumental in spreading people, ideas and social customs throughout the Indian Ocean, leading to a cross-fertilization of cultures. It is strongly believed that prior to Europeans who arrived in the late fifteenth century, the economic, political and cultural world of the Indian Ocean was largely self-sustained and inter-woven. Merchant diasporas from South and South Eastern Asia were behind this development and Odia merchants played a significant role in furthering trade and commerce.

It is heartening that Odisha, earlier known as Kalinga and Utkal justifiably hosts this international conference. The glorious saga of the State which enjoyed flourishing record of maritime trade by sea-faring Odia merchants for centuries is well known. They sailed to south-east countries like Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Bali and numerous islands and became the ambassadors of Odisha's rich art, culture and tradition. Spread of Buddhism to modern Sri Lanka might be traced to that influence. Odisha's rich maritime history, trade links, migration and diaspora might have been deliberated in the conference. Odisha having a long coastline of 480 kms and being endowed with minerals and natural resources finds itself in a better position than other States to take advantage of Government's Blue Economy initiatives for the development and welfare of the people of the State.

This conference has been attended by important Ministers of Union Government, State Government and delegates, scholars, researchers from different parts of India and abroad. I believe, the conference might have explored the scope for regional cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region on matters of environment, Blue Economy concept, capacity building, tourism, climate change, and the importance of people-to-people contact to strengthen social and cultural relation.

Exploiting the rich maritime wealth is fundamental to the nation's economic wellbeing. Development of Blue Economy holds great promise for the nation. The good thing about Blue Economy is that it never disturbs ecosystems and ensures sustainable development. Though the concept is still in making it is time to foresee the future and take steps at proper exploitation of resources in our oceans around our islands and our coasts for



sustainable development both regionally and globally. Let me take the opportunity to highlight the need for co-operation to get more involved in research and new technology to exploit the vast ocean resources.

Occupying a strategic position Indian Ocean holds immense strategic value to a world ever dependent on hydrocarbon energy. The emergence of Indian Ocean maritime cooperation calls for a climate of trust and transparency; sensitivity to each other's interests that will ultimately contribute to peace, stability and prosperity in the region. We are aware of the shift of the global attention on Indian Ocean and resources to the Indian Ocean Region. The emergence of the global economy and the global market-place means that the Indian Ocean region manifests potential for growth in regional trade and interaction in a wide range of sectors and promises economic self-sufficiency and internal cohesion.

The scope for building linkages extends well beyond trade and investment. Things are, as we all know, of course, changing. The leaders of SAARC and ASEAN countries speak with a good deal of conviction about the possibility of building meaningful regional cooperation. The new perspective aims at producing an environment of broader understanding of each other's viewpoints and of increase in people-to-people contact, through tourism, education and academic and cultural exchange. That sense - a feeling of identification with the region and its constituent cultures and people grows from the increased interaction. Hon'ble Prime Minister of India has said and I quote, "India seeks a future for Indian Ocean that lives up to the name of SAGAR - Security and Growth for All in the Region."

In today's fast-moving, ever-changing world, the Indian Ocean which is the world's third largest ocean covering an estimated one-fifth of the earth's water surface, offers a plethora of opportunities. This huge body of water provides an economic lifeline to many people residing in different developing countries. It is expected that the sea-lanes of the Indian Ocean will become even busier in the future as global maritime trade grows in size and importance. Maritime transport, as the most economical and effective means of transport to support international trade, will correspondingly see an increase in activities, and the Ocean, as a crucial trade waterway, will in tandem grow in prominence and significance. Increasing regional cooperation such as one initiated on the platform of this international conference will surely enable us to participate more actively and effectively in the overall development of blue economy.

Stunning diversity and disparity of the countries and inhabitants in the region, not to mention of the complexity and challenges of the issues they face demand a fresh outlook. Here I insist upon the need for creative thinking, new ideas and keenness to look at new ways of doing things while grounded on trust and cooperative approach. The entire world's imminent future is likely to be very much focused on maximising the potential of the world's oceans. If the last 100 years was very much about how we could maximise the use of our land, this century is very much about making the most of our ocean. The Indian Ocean is at the crest of this wave, and with India's leadership and commitment we can bring about a transformative change that we all believe in and aspire for.

The conference must have given a lot of ideas to unite our region in partnership and building a pathway of peace and prosperity overcoming various challenges. While appreciating such endeavour of organizing this kind of conference involving Ministries and international stakeholders I would like to stress upon in making it a regular feature and taking steps for converting the suggestions and findings into action and ultimately a reality.

An expanse as great as the Indian Ocean that divides continents, I am sure, will prove to be a unifying force of people, given their commonalities. Let us seek inspiration in the old quote, "*the land divides, but the sea unites*". With these words, I wish the conference be seen as a step towards a great journey and a great mission.

Jai Hind.