

Speech – World Maritime Day 2025

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Respected Director General of Shipping, distinguished dignitaries, members of the maritime fraternity, young cadets, and dear friends,

It gives me immense pride and joy to be with you today to celebrate World Maritime Day 2025. This occasion is not just about formality or symbolism. It is about reminding ourselves of how central our oceans are to our past, our present, and indeed, our future. World Maritime Day was first celebrated in 1978, to mark the entry into force of the IMO Convention twenty years earlier. Its purpose has always been clear — to highlight the importance of shipping to the global economy, and to focus international attention on safety, security, and the marine environment. It is observed in the last week of September across the world. Each year, the IMO also chooses a theme to spark global dialogue on one vital aspect of maritime affairs.

In India, we also celebrate National Maritime Day on the 5th of April, to commemorate the voyage of SS Loyalty from Mumbai to London in 1919 — India's first step into the international shipping arena as an independent maritime power. While National Maritime Day honours India's own maritime story and contributions, World Maritime Day reminds us that the oceans belong to no single nation — they are the shared responsibility of all humankind, a true global common.

For me personally, this day is especially meaningful. Having served in economic policy and international development — including as Additional Secretary in the Department of Economic Affairs and as India's representative at the Asian Development Bank — I have seen how global financing, infrastructure, and cooperation shape sectors like shipping. Those experiences convinced me that the maritime sector is not only about trade; it is about resilience, partnerships, and national pride.

I remember visiting a small fishing harbour many years ago. Young seafarers were preparing for their very first voyage abroad, and their families were filled with both pride and anxiety. They spoke of how one successful journey could transform their lives, but they also spoke of storms, eroding coastlines, and uncertain futures. That day I realised something important — maritime policy is not just about ships and cargo; it is about people, about families, about resilience.

Later, while working on matters of trade and finance, I saw how shipping costs and delays at ports could affect the competitiveness of entire industries. A delay of a few hours at a single port could ripple across global supply chains, raising costs for businesses and consumers. It reminded me that modern, efficient ports are not simply technical assets; they are strategic levers for national development.

And more recently, when I interacted with young cadets, I felt inspired by their sense of national pride. One of them told me, “Sir, when I sail under the tricolour, I feel I carry India with me across oceans.” That spirit is what makes this sector so special — it is global in reach, but deeply patriotic at heart.

This year’s theme, chosen by the IMO — **“Our Ocean, Our Obligation, Our Opportunity”** — expresses these truths beautifully. The ocean carries more than eighty percent of the world’s trade. For India, it has been our lifeline since ancient times — from the dockyards of Lothal, to the flourishing maritime expeditions of the Cholas, to the vibrant trade networks that connected India to Africa, Arabia, and Southeast Asia. Past civilizations teach us that when the seas were used for exchange and cooperation, prosperity followed. But when they were used for conquest and colonisation, humanity paid a heavy price. Today, our responsibility is to ensure that the seas are harnessed for global good, not narrow ambition.

And this is where the difference between competition and collaboration becomes important. In recent times, we have seen how maritime competition — whether in the South China Sea, in the Indian Ocean, or in polar routes — creates tensions and undermines trust. Unilateralism in the maritime domain risks turning oceans into flashpoints of rivalry. But if the same oceans are seen as spaces for cooperation, they can bring countries together for shared growth — through freedom of navigation, coordinated disaster response, joint research, and climate action. The seas can either divide us, or they can unite us — the choice lies with us.

Our obligation, therefore, is not only to our own citizens but to the global commons. Climate change is no longer a distant concept. For our coastal communities, it is a lived reality — rising sea levels, stronger cyclones, changing fish patterns. Equally, we must protect our marine resources and biodiversity. The coral reefs, mangroves, and fish stocks that sustain millions of livelihoods are under unprecedented stress. Unsustainable fishing, plastic pollution, and ocean acidification are silent threats that demand urgent action. Safeguarding marine ecosystems is not charity for nature; it is an investment in human survival and prosperity. Our obligation is to ensure that maritime development goes hand in hand with environmental stewardship, biodiversity protection, and climate resilience.

At the same time, there are immense opportunities before us. The blue economy can be a new engine of growth — creating jobs in shipbuilding, logistics, cruise tourism, offshore wind energy, and marine biotechnology. For our youth, this sector offers careers of pride and adventure. For our nation, it offers the chance to emerge as a true global maritime hub. And for the world, it offers a pathway to a more sustainable and cooperative globalisation — one that is less carbon-intensive, more inclusive, and truly global in its benefits.

India has already begun preparing for this future. Initiatives like Sagarmala are modernising our ports. Beyond that, the government has articulated a long-term roadmap through the Maritime India Vision 2030, which identifies more than 150 initiatives to transform infrastructure, enhance cargo handling, boost coastal and inland waterway traffic, and make India a global maritime leader.

To finance this growth, the government has created a ₹25,000 crore Maritime Development Fund, now being expanded to ₹70,000 crore, to provide long-term, low-cost capital for shipbuilding, ship repair, and allied infrastructure. Similarly, the Sagarmala Finance Corporation, India's first dedicated maritime NBFC, has been set up to bridge financial gaps for ports and maritime projects.

On the shipbuilding front, the Shipbuilding Financial Assistance Policy 2.0 provides subsidies to Indian shipyards to overcome global cost disadvantages, while large ship projects have now been accorded infrastructure status, allowing easier financing.

Recent years have also seen the inauguration of the Mumbai International Cruise Terminal under the *Cruise Bharat Mission*, showcasing India's ambitions in cruise tourism. At the same time, ports are embracing sustainability, with green hydrogen pilots at Tuticorin, methanol bunkering facilities, and the establishment of green coastal shipping corridors between major ports.

On the legislative front, India has modernised its legal framework: the Merchant Shipping Act, 2025, the Carriage of Goods by Sea Act, 2025, and the Indian Ports Act, 2025 replace century-old laws, aligning India with international conventions, improving safety, enhancing seafarer welfare, and strengthening port governance. These reforms ensure India's maritime growth is globally competitive, legally robust, and future-ready.

Yet, amidst all this progress, we must never forget the human face of shipping. The seafarers who spend months away from their families. The dock workers who keep our ports alive through day and night. The coastal communities whose culture and livelihoods are tied to the sea. During the pandemic, when supply chains broke down, it was these unsung heroes who kept essential goods moving. If we celebrate Maritime Day today, it is above all to honour them.

Looking ahead, I believe three priorities should guide us. First, sustainability — embracing green fuels, renewable energy, and coastal resilience. Second, biodiversity — protecting marine ecosystems, regulating resource use, and ensuring that livelihoods depending on the ocean are secure for future generations. Third, international cooperation — working with partners across the Indo-Pacific and beyond to keep our sea lanes open, secure, and sustainable. Maritime collaboration must be the cornerstone of peace and prosperity in the 21st century, just as maritime competition once became the trigger for conflict in the past.

Friends, our scriptures describe the ocean as the *samudra* — vast, eternal, and life-giving. It gives us food, employment, trade, and security. But it also tests our discipline, foresight, and compassion. On this World Maritime Day, let us pledge to treat our oceans not as an infinite resource to be exploited, but as a shared trust between generations. If we live up to this obligation, the opportunities before us are limitless: stronger trade, sustainable growth, secure livelihoods, and a greener planet.

I congratulate the Directorate General of Shipping and the National Maritime Day Celebration Committee for organising this meaningful event. Let us work together so that India's maritime story — ancient yet modern, rooted yet forward-looking — continues to inspire not only our nation, but the entire world.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.

Jai Maritime Bharat.