

Plenary Session: “Unlocking Growth – How Ports and Logistics Policies Drive India’s Competitiveness”

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Venue: Kandla

Distinguished dignitaries, senior officers, industry leaders, and colleagues from the maritime and logistics community,

It is a privilege to be here in Kandla — a port that has long symbolised India’s maritime strength, resilience, and reform. Few places capture India’s journey from aspiration to achievement as powerfully as this coast does. From its revival after independence to becoming one of the country’s busiest ports, Kandla has been both a witness and a catalyst in India’s maritime transformation.

When we speak of “unlocking growth,” we are really speaking of unlocking India’s destiny. For a civilisation that has always looked outward to the seas — from Lothal and Muziris to Surat and Kandla — the ocean has never been a boundary; it has been a bridge. Every major chapter of India’s prosperity has been written with maritime ink. And today, as the world enters a new age of trade realignments, logistics transformation, and sustainable growth, India once again stands at the helm — not as a follower of tides, but as a creator of currents.

The theme of this plenary — “Unlocking Growth: How Ports and Logistics Policies Drive India’s Competitiveness” — could not be more timely. We are living through an inflection point. For decades, logistics was seen as a background enabler; today, it is the frontline driver of national competitiveness. The way a nation moves its goods is now inseparable from how it moves its economy.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently said that “India is ready to serve as the steady lighthouse of global maritime growth.” This is not just a metaphor — it is a measurable reality. In the last ten years, India’s major ports have increased their operating surplus ninefold, cargo movement on inland waterways has risen by over 700 percent, and average vessel turnaround time has dropped below 48 hours. These are not statistics; they are the reflection of a nation that has learned to convert policy into performance.

At the heart of this transformation lies policy vision — the understanding that ports are not just points of arrival or departure. They are mirrors of governance, engines of growth, and laboratories of reform.

Under the Maritime India Vision 2030, more than 150 initiatives have been identified to modernise ports, optimise cargo movement, digitise operations, and green our logistics. The Maritime Development Fund and Sagarmala Finance Corporation are bringing new models of long-term financing into the sector. The infrastructure status accorded to large ships has unlocked access to low-cost capital, allowing Indian shipyards to compete globally.

The Prime Minister has also drawn attention to a powerful truth — that India spends nearly ₹6 lakh crore annually on foreign shipping services, an amount comparable to our defence budget. Imagine if even half of that were to circulate within India’s own shipbuilding, ship-repair, and port ecosystem. The implications for employment, innovation, and national self-reliance would be transformative. *Atmanirbharta* in shipping is not merely an ambition — it is a strategic necessity.

When we look for successful examples of port-led development, Gujarat offers lessons for the world — and Kandla itself stands as a living example of that success. It shows how the right combination of vision, governance, and partnership can transform not just a coastline but an entire economic geography. The success of Kandla and Gujarat rests on four pillars — synchronised planning of ports, industrial corridors, and logistics parks; seamless multimodal integration; transparent regulation that attracts private

investment; and a forward-looking culture of digitalisation and efficiency. It is no coincidence that Gujarat handles nearly 40 percent of India's cargo throughput. It is the outcome of policy continuity, leadership clarity, and execution discipline.

Replicating this model nationwide is the next step. Every port must be seen as a growth node — connected to railways, highways, inland waterways, and industrial clusters. The National Logistics Policy and PM Gati Shakti together provide the blueprint for this integration. But blueprints must translate into blue oceans of opportunity — and that depends on our ability to execute, innovate, and collaborate.

Ease of doing business continues to be a central pillar. The replacement of colonial-era maritime laws with forward-looking frameworks like the Merchant Shipping Act 2025, the Carriage of Goods by Sea Act 2025, and the Indian Ports Act 2025 represents a quiet revolution. These laws align India with international conventions, enhance safety, improve investor confidence, and cut procedural delays. Simplified clearance systems and integrated customs–shipping databases have already reduced average dwell time to less than three days, placing Indian ports ahead of many advanced economies.

Yet policy reform is only one half of competitiveness. The other half is digital transformation. Integration of IoT-based cargo tracking, predictive AI for yard management, and real-time Port Community Systems is redefining port efficiency. A truly competitive logistics sector is one where data moves as smoothly as goods do.

The future, however, will be determined not just by technology but by sustainability. The blue economy and green logistics are central to India's maritime growth story. As the Prime Minister noted, the next 25 years will see India's coastal regions emerge as global hubs of sustainable maritime activity. From green hydrogen projects at Kandla, to methanol bunkering at Tuticorin, to renewable-powered terminals at Paradip and Vizhinjam, India is demonstrating that economic growth and environmental responsibility can advance hand in hand.

The India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) adds another strategic dimension — redefining global trade routes and placing India at the centre of a new connectivity paradigm. To anchor this opportunity, our ports must deliver world-class reliability, resilience, and efficiency. This will require alignment between central and state governments, between public and private investments, and between innovation and infrastructure.

As this transformation accelerates, one principle must remain constant: the competitiveness of India's logistics sector is the competitiveness of India itself. Whether it is the exporter in Morbi, the shipbuilder in Kochi, or the freight forwarder in Kandla — the ease with which they move goods determines how India moves forward.

The National Shipping Board has been working with all stakeholders — ministries, state governments, and industry — to strengthen this alignment. It has facilitated dialogue on coastal shipping, port procedure harmonisation, seafarer welfare, and integration of multimodal logistics data systems. The Board serves both as a policy think-tank and a bridge between decision-makers and doers, ensuring that reforms result in measurable outcomes on the ground.

To truly unlock growth, three priorities must guide our collective effort.

First, integration — connecting not just infrastructure but institutions. A port is only as efficient as the road that leads to it, the warehouse that supports it, and the regulation that governs it.

Second, innovation — embracing digitalisation, sustainability, and data-driven decision-making. Artificial intelligence and green fuels are no longer futuristic ideas; they are today's competitiveness tools.

And third, inclusion — ensuring that growth in ports and logistics translates into livelihoods for our people: for our seafarers, our coastal communities, and the youth entering maritime professions. India's human capital is its greatest comparative advantage.

India's maritime resurgence is no coincidence. It is the product of reform, investment, and faith — faith that the seas which once carried conquerors

can now carry cooperation. The Indian Ocean is no longer a frontier of competition; it is becoming a corridor of collaboration.

This is the moment to think audaciously. In the decade ahead, India can emerge as the global logistics nerve centre — a nation whose ports set global benchmarks for efficiency, whose shipyards build the green vessels of tomorrow, whose policies invite capital and confidence, and whose maritime professionals carry the tricolour across every ocean with pride.

If the twentieth century belonged to the land economies, the twenty-first will belong to those who master the seas. And India — with its vision, its talent, and its resolve — is ready to lead that century.

Thank you.