

**Statement**

**by**



**Ambassador Rajiv K Bhatia**

Director General, ICWA

**at**

**National Dialogue on the Ocean Economy**

**on**

**“Session on Moving Beyond Sector-based Thinking:  
Policy Framework and Capacity Building”**

**at**

**Port Louis  
23 July, 2013**

Let me begin by expressing my warm gratitude to the organizers of the conference, the Prime Minister's Office and the Board of Investment of Mauritius for their invitation, generous hospitality and excellent arrangements for my visit. This conference is a very important and timely initiative. We are confident that it will culminate in the finalization of a blueprint for optimal exploitation of opportunities concerning the ocean economy.

2. At the outset, it is essential for us to appreciate accurately the contours of India's worldview and role of the Indian Ocean in it. Two false notions should be addressed head on. The first is that policy makers in India suffer from 'sea-blindness.' Although this was partially true in the past, the perspective of policy makers in Delhi has undergone a substantive transformation in the past three decades. They now derive inspiration from some of India's visionary thinkers and leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru who had stressed, over half a century ago, India's centrality in the Indian Ocean. In 1948, Nehru stated that 'anything that happens in the whole of the Indian Ocean affects and is affected by India. It simply cannot help it.'

3. Having personally observed and experienced India's multi-dimensional links through visits to the Cape of Good Hope, Durban and Mombasa, Port Louis, Colombo, Male and Gan, Myanmar's southwestern coast and the islands of Java and Bali, I am convinced that the Indian Ocean holds a very special place in the heart of every Indian. We notice that our authorities have now been optimally conscious of the importance of maritime dimensions of foreign policy.

4. The second erroneous notion is that in its enthusiasm to pursue its Look East Policy, India has been neglecting the region west and south of it. This is not true. The country's spectacular economic growth in the past two decades, its continuing reform process, and its expanding worldview enable it to develop and adopt a broader and inclusive view of Asia. This is reflected in the gradual adoption by New Delhi of the new concept of Indo-Pacific Region (APR.) This idea is based on our recognition that security and development challenges of the Indian Ocean are linked inextricably, more than ever before, with those of the Pacific Ocean. India's foreign policy is now being moulded by this broader perspective.

5. India is both a land and a maritime power. It is conscious of the immense scope that exists for the development of its oceanic economy. The idea of ‘Blue Economy’ has slowly been gaining acceptance in India, driven by our basic awareness that the oceans are a treasure which should be put to the benefit of humankind through a strategy of sustainable management. A holistic strategy would encompass everything that the seas have to offer – fisheries, minerals, oil and gas and many other assets. Sustainable management of oceans has immense possibilities. I believe that deliberations at this Mauritius conference would greatly help in widening the frontiers of our knowledge of an important and complex subject.

6. Imbued with the awareness of political and diplomatic implications of a viable oceanic policy, I wish to put forward the following suggestions for further consideration and debate at this august gathering of leaders and experts:

- i) Security and development are twins; one is linked to the other. Hence, a discussion on how to accelerate economic development in the Indian Ocean region should factor in the ongoing debate on security issues too. This covers conventional security matters including the changing dynamics among Great Powers as well as Non-Traditional Security (NTS) issues such as climate change, food and energy security, piracy, terrorism, drug trafficking and humanitarian assistance during natural disasters. ‘Maritime security’, as Admiral D. K. Joshi, a former Chief of Naval Staff of India, points out, ‘has now expanded to include human security, climate change, and security of food and livelihood.’ An objective assessment of what the international community should do to support and encourage those forces that favour stability, security, peace and prosperity is as essential as an identification of negative factors in this context. The view in India is that freedom of navigation, security of sea-lanes of communication (SLOCs), and functional cooperation among the major Navies such as US, India and China are laudable objectives that need to be pursued and encouraged by all concerned.
- ii) Amidst an increasing perception regarding the shift of power from west to east, there is the rising salience of the Indo-Pacific Region. Accepting its relevance

could be beneficial to the Indian Ocean states. They may wish to examine the concept which has been gaining support in such diverse countries as Australia, Japan, Indonesia, Vietnam, US and India. Acceptance of the concept may trigger efforts for strengthening or creating a suitable regional architecture.

- iii) Considering the vastness of the Indo-Pacific Region stretching from the western reaches of the Indian Ocean to the Sea of Japan and Australia, it seems unlikely that there would emerge a single, over-arching institution, capable to deal with all its challenges in the near future. It is notable that in the Pacific area, East Asia Summit and various other ASEAN-driven institutions are being built up systematically. Therefore, in the western sector of the Indian Ocean, we need to speed up our efforts to strengthen and empower our unique institution, the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC). A few worthwhile suggestions are: (a) Specific inclusion of the goal to develop ocean economy in its mandate, (b) strengthening the Troika comprising the past, present and future Chairs, (c) exploring some form of acceptable linkage between IOR-ARC and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), and (d) promoting consensus for convening the first-ever Summit of the Association's highest leaders.
- iv) Another suggestion concerning the policy and institutional framework would be to deepen collaborative links between IOR-ARC and the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), both hosted by Mauritius. Recently these institutions have accorded reciprocal observer status to each other. This is a welcome step, but its logic demands that more concrete measures may be devised for making the welfare of Indian Ocean Island-States an integral part of the agenda, especially of the IOR-ARC.
- v) Relations of the Indian Ocean Island-States with India, the premier resident power, which has a rich and long history of exchanges, interactions and cooperation, need to be deepened and diversified. Through consultations and

consensus, a multi-dimensional plan for cooperation should be developed, covering both security and development dimensions. Special measures may be needed to sensitize India Inc and make it fully aware of the vast opportunities of cooperation with IOR-ARC and IOC, and Mauritius in particular, so that the development of oceanic economy becomes a top priority. The recent Economic and Business Conference, co-hosted by IOR-ARC and India, which was held earlier this month, in Port Louis was the right step, but its momentum would need to be sustained through effective follow-up.

- vi) In this context, developments in diverse fields - shipbuilding, shipping industry, ports, fisheries, seabed resources, inland waterways, marine tourism and leisure industry, ship recycling industry etc. - need to be studied closely with a view to establishing specific areas of potential cooperation between India on the one hand and the Indian Ocean Island- States in particular on the other. It is noted that India accords higher importance than before to maritime infrastructure and offshore resources to its economic development. As a leading scholar in the field, Dr. Vijay Sakhuja, who is Director (Research) in my institution, has noted (in his acclaimed work, 'Asian Maritime Power', published in 2011) '...current Indian policies are facilitating development of infrastructure and the leadership is conscious of the fact that if India is to sustain its current growth rate to nearly 8 per cent, it must invest in maritime infrastructure.'

7. It is recognized that 'knowledge is power.' If scholars and experts show the right path, political and business leaders would listen and may even follow. Hence, there is a need for closer dialogue and greater synergy among the strategic communities of our countries. India's leading foreign policy think tank, the Indian Council of World Affairs, continues to be inspired by the Nehruian vision of Asia and the Indian Ocean. We hosted an international conference on 'Reinvigorating Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) in May 2011. This was followed by another important event, the conference on 'Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific Region: Asian Perspectives' in May 2013. We have now started strategizing about yet another ambitious event 'Indian Ocean Dialogue.' We would be happy to collaborate with a

suitable institution in this sub-region in order to organize the Dialogue and to promote tangible cooperation, in an integrated manner, on matters of common interest concerning the Indian Ocean in political, security and economic spheres.

8. In the end, may I take the opportunity to invite leaders of Mauritius, particularly H.E. Prime Minister and H.E. the Foreign Minister, to come and interact with our scholars, experts and practitioners under the auspices of the legendary Sapru House on challenges facing the Indian Ocean and the future of oceanic economy. I hope this would be possible during their next visits to India.

