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Multinational collaborative frameworks must to tackle maritime challenges of Indian Ocean Region: Raksha Mantri at 4th Goa Maritime Conclave

Calls for adhering to international laws for a free & rule-based maritime order

Shri Rajnath Singh urges nations to work together to reduce carbon emissions & switch to sustainable practices to deal with climate change

“Sharing of surveillance data need of the hour to tackle Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing”

Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh has called for establishing multinational collaborative mitigation frameworks in the Indian Ocean Region to effectively tackle common maritime challenges such as climate change, piracy, terrorism, drug-trafficking, overfishing and freedom of commerce on high seas. He was delivering the keynote address at the fourth edition of Goa Maritime Conclave (GMC) on October 30, 2023.

The three-day conclave, which commenced on October 29, 2023, is being attended by Delegate in Charge of Defence, Comoros Mr Mohamed Ali Youssoufa and Chiefs of Navies/Heads of Maritime Forces/Senior representatives from eleven other Indian Ocean nations - Bangladesh, Indonesia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Myanmar, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka & Thailand.

The Raksha Mantri emphasised that common maritime priorities need to be addressed cooperatively by avoiding selfish interests that make the region less secure and less prosperous. He underlined the importance of respecting the international maritime laws, as enunciated in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982.

“A free, open and rule-based maritime order is a priority for all of us. ‘Might is right’ has no place in such a maritime order. Adherence to international laws and agreements must be our lodestar. Our narrow immediate interests may tempt us to flout or disregard the well-established international law, but doing so would lead to the breakdown of our civilised maritime relations. Our common security and prosperity cannot be preserved without all of us committing to cooperatively adhering to the legitimate maritime rules of engagement. Fair rules of engagement are crucial for

fostering collaboration and ensuring that no single country dominates others in a hegemonic manner,” said Shri Rajnath Singh.

On climate change, the Raksha Mantri stated that the collaborative mitigation framework can involve the countries working together to reduce carbon emissions and transition to sustainable practices. He pointed out that the world could overcome this problem if all countries accepted the responsibility to cut emissions by investing in green economy and share technology & capital with the needy countries.

Shri Rajnath Singh also referred to Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, a challenge which relates to resource over-exploitation. “IUU fishing endangers ocean ecosystems and sustainable fishery. It also threatens our economic security and regional & global food security. A multinational collaborative effort for compilation and sharing of surveillance data is the need of the hour. It will help in identifying actors with irregular or threatening behaviour, which will have to be countered resolutely,” he said.

To put in place these mitigation frameworks, the Raksha Mantri called for collaboration, and sharing of resources & expertise among nations. He elaborated it further by explaining the difference between narrow national self-interest and mutual benefit based on enlightened self-interest of all nations. “The optimal outcome often involves cooperation and building trust among nations, but the fear of being taken advantage of or acting alone in a hostile world can lead to suboptimal decisions. The challenge is to find solutions that promote cooperation, build trust and mitigate the risks. We build trust through dialogues such as GMC, joint exercises, industrial collaboration, sharing of resources, respecting international law, etc. Trust among cooperating countries would lead to optimal outcomes in respect of common maritime priorities,” he said.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister of State for External Affairs Smt Meenakshi Lekhi batted for cooperation among IOR nations to ensure peace & prosperity in the region. Underscoring the importance of IOR, she lauded the Indian Navy for protecting the nation’s maritime interests and being the first responder in the region in times of crisis.

In his address, Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral R Hari Kumar emphasised the changing nature of threats, both traditional & non-traditional and those emanating from the sea. He added that the GMC offers a valuable opportunity towards developing effective mitigation strategies against such threats, thereby maintaining peace and securing growth in the IOR.

After his keynote address, the Raksha Mantri visited the ‘Make in India’ stalls, which have been set up at the venue, to enable the visiting dignitaries of the 12 countries to catch a glimpse of the growing capabilities of India’s defence industry in indigenous manufacturing of state-of-the-art weapons, equipment and platforms.

The theme for this fourth edition is *‘Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean Region: Converting Common Maritime Priorities into Collaborative Mitigating Frameworks’*. A number of sessions are being held during the conclave, under the aegis of the Naval War College, Goa. Interactions are being held with eminent speakers and subject matter experts focusing on:

- Identifying Gaps in Regulatory and Legal Frameworks for Achieving Maritime Security in the IOR.
- Formulation of a Common Multilateral Maritime Strategy and Operating Protocols for GMC Nations for Collective Mitigation of Maritime Threats and Challenges.
- Identification and Establishment of Collaborative Training Programmes with Centre of Excellence across the IOR.
- Leveraging Activities Pursued Through Existing Multilateral Organisations in the IOR towards Generating Collective Maritime competencies.

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