

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SMT. DROUPADI MURMU
ON THE OCCASION OF 8TH CONVOCATION OF INDIAN
MARITIME UNIVERSITY**

Chennai, October 27, 2023

I am delighted to be among you on the occasion of the 8th Convocation of the Indian Maritime University. I convey my hearty congratulations to all the students who received their degrees today.

As befits the largest maritime university in our country, the Indian Maritime University and its affiliated colleges have produced excellent experts, professionals and leaders. And it gladdens me to say that as an alumnus of this esteemed university, you join a long line of enterprising and talented personnel, whose work, leadership and intellect have made remarkable and profound contributions to the advancement of maritime activities.

The human relation with the ocean is one that has existed ever since our ancestors first laid eyes on the waters that lay before them. Even an exceptional imagination could scarcely do justice to the role played by the oceans in the development of human civilisation. The vast expanse of water has provided us with mystery and intrigue, stories and traditions, resources and minerals.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You must be familiar with the saying, "Whoever rules the waves, rules the world". A cursory and brief reading of history is enough to show that whoever controls the oceans has access to the whole of the globe. The sea routes available to India, from her ports from Kandla to Kolkata, connect her to all parts of the rest of the world.

Long before the roads or airways; trade, culture, people and ideas usually moved by sea. The best example of this is one of the world's earliest known docks at Lothal, a port town of the Indus Valley

civilisation. It was a thriving trade centre with its beads, gems and ornaments reaching West Asia and Africa.

The Pallavas of South India had a powerful navy. In the 10th and 11th centuries, Chola's maritime prowess and skills were unmatched which spread our trade and traditions to distant lands. Tamil Nadu has been a land of sea farers. There are evidences of commercial and cultural contacts between South East Asia and South India. The Cholas, Cheras and Pandyas of Southern India had established maritime trade links with the local rulers of Sumatra, Java, Malay Peninsula, Thailand and China. The people of Odisha, then known as Kalinga also travelled through sea routes to South East Asia. The tradition of Bali Jatra is still popular in Odisha and it is held in October-November for about a week.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

India has a remarkable marine position with a 7,500 km long coastline and 1,382 offshore islands. We also have 14,500 kilometers of potentially navigable waterways, apart from a strategic location on important maritime trade routes. The country's maritime sector plays a vital role in its trade and economic growth, as 95 percent of the country's trade by volume and 65 percent of the trade by value is undertaken through maritime transport. The coastal economy sustains over 4 million fishermen and India is the second largest fish-producing nation in the world with a fleet of about 2,50,000 fishing boats.

While this is impressive on all counts, we may wonder if we have exploited the full potential of the sector. In earlier times, conservative apprehensions about crossing the sea cost us dearly. Then, coming out of the yoke of 200 years of colonial rule, we became more focused on continental development, forgetting that the continental development and maritime development are mutually complementary. We, of course, also lacked the economic and industrial resources to fully establish a strong maritime presence.

Before we can fully exploit the potential of this sector, we will have to overcome several challenges. For example, a lot of container ship cargo is diverted to nearby foreign ports due to depth restrictions. In the merchant and civilian shipbuilding industry, we need to aim for the highest standards of efficiency, efficacy and competitiveness. The operational efficiency and turnaround time of Indian ports need to match the global average benchmarks. India does not figure in the top 20 nations when it comes to the annual port calls. In the list of 50 best container ports worldwide, we only have two. The Indian ports must address infrastructural and operational challenges before they graduate to the next level. The majority of our fishing fleet is yet to be mechanised.

In this context, the Sagarmala programme is a significant move away from “port development” to “port-led development”. The five pillars of “port-led development” envisaged by Sagarmala are port modernisation, port connectivity, port-led industrialisation, coastal community development, and coastal shipping or inland water transportation.

Earlier this month, the third edition of the Global Maritime India Summit attracted rupees 10 lakh crore of investment, which will help in achieving ‘Amrit Kaal Vision 2047’. Moreover, the Government of India is working to realise its vision of ‘Ports for Prosperity and Ports for Progress’.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

India and Indians are not just managing shipping companies, global ports and hubs and operating ships, but also are steering and driving the global economy. Following the successful landing of Chandrayaan-3 on the Moon's South Pole, we are now preparing for the 'Samudrayaan' mission, a groundbreaking journey to explore 6,000-metre deep ocean waters and to study the deep sea resources and biodiversity assessment.

One of the gravest challenges of our time is climate catastrophe which includes rising temperatures and sea levels. The maritime

sector needs to be agile, proactive and swift in adaptation and mitigation of climate change which risks disrupting livelihoods, particularly among vulnerable communities.

Dear Students,

Graduation marks a major transition in one's life. It marks the transition of a learner into a practitioner who takes on bigger challenges and assumes greater responsibilities towards the nation and society. You have not only professional responsibility but also an obligation towards the health of ecology and ecosystem. The need of the hour is sustainable and efficient maritime-related activities including shipping. More resilient and greener practices in the ocean are also essential for a healthy ecosystem.

Despite being one of the youngest of the Central Universities, IMU has proved its mettle. IMU has the capacity, faculty and characteristics to do more and become the lighthouse in all matters pertaining to the maritime sector. It has the potential to shine as the globally acclaimed centre of excellence for maritime education, research, training, driving academic partnerships and capacity building, while broadening its expertise to allied disciplines such as maritime law, ocean governance and marine sciences.

You all must be ready to shoulder a higher responsibility than would be expected at a similar age in many other professions. You should possess the leadership qualities necessary to guide your team members, often under challenging circumstances. As a merchant navy officer, you should display special qualities to cope with the demands of the profession such as spending several months away from home and living in proximity with other crew members. I am sure that you already possess all these qualities and are fully capable to take up your assignments.

I once again congratulate degree recipients and gold medalists and extend my best wishes to you. May you have the strength to weather the storms that life throws in your path! May you bring glory to your alma mater and the country.

Thank you.
Jai Hind!
Jai Bharat!