

**Remarks by His Excellency Md. Golam Sarwar, Secretary General
of SAARC**

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Plenary Session 5

**Navigating New Frontiers: Evolving Maritime Landscape in the 21st
Century**

(Sunday, 16 February 2025)

**Madam Moderator Ms. Ruchira Kamboj,
Distinguished Panelists,**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a great honour and a privilege for me to address this esteemed gathering at the 8th edition of the Indian Ocean Conference.

I am personally elated to be in this beautiful city of Muscat where I served as the Ambassador of Bangladesh to the Sultanate of Oman from 2017 to 2020.

Let me begin by extending sincere congratulations and gratitude to His Majesty's Government of the Sultanate of Oman, the Government of India and India Foundation for successfully hosting the IOC2025 and bringing us together for deliberations on very important issues impacting the Indian Ocean Region.

I am confident that this Conference will contribute towards fostering deeper partnership and a greater goodwill; all towards peace, prosperity and progress of the region, sub-regions and the world, at large.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I stand before you not only as a representative of eight SAARC nations but as a voice for the aspirations of over 2 billion people in South Asia- a region deeply intertwined with the dynamics of the Indian Ocean.

Since its inception in 1985, SAARC has represented the high aspirations of its Member States to promote the welfare of the people of the region and improve their quality of lives. For the SAARC Members, including the three landlocked countries, the Indian Ocean is a lifeline for their external trade and access to the high seas.

As we navigate the waves into the 21st century, the landscape of global trade, environmental challenges, technological advancements, and geopolitical shifts is transforming the maritime world in ways that are both exciting and, at times, daunting.

The maritime industry today is being shaped by a multitude of forces. These forces demand that we rethink how we approach the seas, how we manage resources, and how we collaborate across borders. The way we navigate, utilize, and govern our oceans must evolve to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world. The decisions we make today will shape the future of maritime trade and its role in a sustainable, interconnected global economy.

Thanks to technologies and innovation, access to maritime areas and their abundance of resources has reached new frontiers with wider prospects. This together has brought in new global challenges on security front – both traditional and non-traditional – as well as environment, necessitating better maritime governance architecture.

Distinguished Guests,

Let me, therefore, break down my views on the theme today “Navigating New Frontiers: Evolving Maritime Landscape in the 21st Century” into three main

pillars. One, climate change. Two, maritime security. And three, global maritime governance.

Climate change: The rising tide that has threatened us all

The climate crisis is one of the most pressing challenges of our time, affecting every corner of the globe. From rising sea levels and more frequent natural disasters to disruptions in ecosystems and human livelihoods, its impacts are far-reaching. Climate-induced disasters have engulfed coastal states and small islands as well as the mountains. The 2021 IPCC report found the Indian Ocean to be warming more quickly than other oceans.

South Asia, a region with a vast, dynamic human capital base, is achieving notable economic progress. But sadly, the region is highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, including floods, droughts, cyclones, and extreme heatwaves, that pose a significant risk to its growth trajectory, food security, infrastructure, and people's livelihoods. Our people face a dual challenge of pursuing socio-economic development and protecting it from disasters.

Coastal nations, and particularly small island developing states (SIDS), face existential threats from rising sea levels and extreme weather events. Addressing the climate crisis demands urgent global cooperation, innovative solutions, and a commitment to reducing our environmental footprint. In the maritime sector, this includes transitioning to cleaner fuels, improving energy efficiency, and exploring new technologies to protect both the environment and our economies.

It is crucial that initiatives are taken towards investing in blue economies, transitioning to renewable energy sources, innovation in agriculture, sustainable urbanization, nature-based solutions and safeguarding marine ecosystems to foster a harmonious balance between economic growth and environmental conservation. We also need our focus on joint adaptation strategies, such as implementing early warning systems, sharing best practices for disaster preparedness, and providing financial assistance for countries vulnerable to climate impacts.

This also means honouring commitments under the Paris Agreement and ensuring that developing nations have access to the technology and financing needed for adaptation and mitigation. Let us not forget that the fight against climate change is also a fight for justice.

Maritime Security: The anchor of peace and stability

Maritime security faces a range of complex and evolving challenges in the modern world. These challenges are not only technical or operational but are also deeply tied to geopolitical, economic, and environmental factors. Attaining and maintaining the safety, security, and sustainability of the ocean is of vital importance to the global economic growth.

Maritime law and order is upset by threats of terrorism and radicalisation; trafficking and transnational organised crimes; cyber-attacks; as well as attacks on critical maritime infrastructure and technology. One report states that almost half of the global incidents of piracy occurred in the Indian Ocean in the recent years, undermining the safety and the security of maritime trade and other related activities.

Securing new frontiers in the maritime sector, therefore, goes beyond merely safeguarding geographical boundaries. It calls for a comprehensive approach that integrates a variety of perspectives, addressing the complex challenges of today's world.

As we seek innovative solutions, the focus must be equally on maintaining security and sustainability and ensuring the resilience of the global supply chain. The international community must proactively adapt to these emerging frontiers, embrace regional and global collaboration, and advance the global mechanisms to ensure a safe and sustainable ocean.

Global maritime governance

The legal frameworks governing the laws of Sea like UNCLOS and other conventions remain the strong foundation for global maritime governance. Yet, as the maritime landscape evolves, so too must our commitment to upholding and strengthening UNCLOS.

We must address emerging challenges such as deep-sea mining, maritime cybersecurity, maritime digitization and artificial intelligence, and the militarization of the oceans, to manage the associated risks. The growing complexities of ocean exploration, climate change, and environmental protection also underscore the urgent need for updated robust legal frameworks.

For South Asia, UNCLOS is a safeguard. It ensures our right to access the seas, participate in the exploration of marine resources, and benefit from the global commons. However, these rights must be actively protected and promoted for all.

I call upon the international community to reaffirm its commitment to UNCLOS and to ensure that its principles are upheld in letter and spirit. Let us work together to close gaps in implementation and to ensure that the convention remains relevant in the face of new challenges.

**Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

As we navigate the new frontiers of the 21st century, we must not lose sight of those who are most vulnerable. Landlocked, least developed and small island countries face unique challenges in the maritime domain, from limited access to ports to inadequate infrastructure and capacity constraints. We must advocate for their rights and ensure that they are not marginalized in global maritime governance.

It is also crucial to address the disparities in technological advancements and their access between the Global South and the Global North.

As we navigate the complexities of the 21st century, let us harness the spirit of cooperation and solidarity. Together, we can build an inclusive, equitable, sustainable, prosperous, and resilient future for all.

I wish this Conference every success.

I thank you.