



Indian Council of World Affairs

Sapru House, Barakhamba Road

New Delhi

Speech

by

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at the

International Conference

on

'South China Sea: Emerging Scenario'

at

**UGC Centre for Southeast Asian & Pacific Studies
Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh**

24-26 July 2017

Prof. A Damodaram, Vice Chancellor, Sri Venkateswara University;

My senior colleague Amb N Ravi, former Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, GoI;

Commodore Udai Rao, Trustee, Institute of Contemporary Studies, Bangalore;

Dr. Upendra Choudhury, Director, Indian Council for Social Science Research;

Prof. Jean A Berlie, University of Hong Kong;

Academicians, experts, researchers and scholars from various parts of India and abroad; Distinguished guests;

Ladies and gentlemen,

- It is an honour for me to be present amongst this august gathering for the International Conference on “South China Sea: Emerging Scenario”, which is a pertinent subject matter in today’s scholarship on International Relations studies. I must congratulate the Centre for Southeast Asian & Pacific Studies, Sri Venkateswara University for organising this timely and important Conference, in collaboration with the Indian Council for World Affairs or ICWA.
- Indian Council of World Affairs is India’s oldest foreign policy think tank specializing in foreign and security policy issues and an Institute of National Importance declared by our Parliament. One of the key objectives of the Council is to have collaboration with academic and research institutions in organising national and international conferences throughout the nation, to spread awareness amongst students, providing platforms for the generation of new ideas, analysing existing policies and events, strengthening the understanding of international politics and Indian foreign policy.
- The South China Sea region has traditionally been important in terms of resources, global trade and sea lanes of communication. Of late, with centre of global politics and economy gravitating towards Indo-Pacific region, it has assumed greater geopolitical and geostrategic significance. It is the second

most used sea lane in the world; over 10 million barrels of crude oil a day are shipped through the Strait of Malacca. The region has huge reserves of oil and Natural gas. Not to mention abundant fisheries stock, minerals etc.

- These rich and untapped resources and the trade routes have also made this region highly contested with overlapping claims to the Islands and reefs being made by China, Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei, Taiwan, Indonesia and the Philippines.
- The South China Sea region is important for India. About 55 % of our sea borne trade goes through this route. India's "Look/ Act East Policy" reflects a profound shift in India's geo-political outlook towards the world to its East. India has consciously forged collaborations with Southeast and East Asian countries, extending to Australia, New Zealand as well as the Pacific Islands, both bilaterally and through ASEAN-led fora, to ensure regional peace and security. Equally, we remain committed to enhance maritime cooperation, to realise the full potential of our ocean economy, and to step up cooperation in countering terrorism, cyber security, anti-piracy and other transnational crimes.
- Enhancing economic prosperity and trade in the region is among the key objectives of our 'Act East Policy'. India is committed to work with countries in the region to develop physical, maritime, air & digital connectivity infrastructure. We expect to see these corridors of connectivity being transformed into corridors of economic cooperation and prosperity.
- Maritime Safety and Security in the region has been one of the prime concerns for India as a safe and secure maritime environment is prerequisite for enhancement of economic cooperation. India, as a responsible power, is increasingly shouldering responsibilities in the area of Maritime security. In recent years, we have concluded White Shipping Agreements with many

countries and emerged as first responders in HADR situations, from Fiji to Yemen. Indian navy has been actively involved in anti-piracy operations in Indo-Pacific region. We believe in Asian security architecture, which is open, transparent, balanced and inclusive. And, promote dialogue and predictable behavior rooted in international norms and respect for sovereignty.

- Freedom of navigation, overflight and commerce is therefore imperative in this context. India expects nations to resolve territorial and maritime disputes peacefully and in accordance with international law. India has recently settled its maritime boundary with Bangladesh in accordance with international law.
- I hope, the various deliberations over the course of the next three days would provide a better conceptual understanding into the entire debate that surrounds the South China Sea region. This clarity on the entire issue would provide for a strong foundation to carry out further research on this subject which is unbiased and based on empirical research, in order to derive the policy options for the one of the most important regions in the contemporary times.
- In conclusion I would like to wish the conference a big success.
- I would also like to thank the organisers, particularly Prof Reddy, Director of the Centre and his team for the excellent hospitality provided to me and my colleague from ICWA.
- Thank you,
