

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE AT THE FIRST CONVOCATION OF INDIAN
MARITIME UNIVERSITY**

Chennai, Tamil Nadu: 22-02-2014

I am happy to be with you on the occasion of the First Convocation of the Indian Maritime University, Chennai. I understand that over a thousand graduates and post graduates in various disciplines such as Nautical Sciences, Marine Engineering, Naval Architecture & Ocean Engineering, Shipbuilding & Repair, Port and Shipping Management, International Transportation & Logistics Management, and Maritime Law are getting their degrees today. This Convocation marks your transition from student to maritime professional. I am sure that throughout your career you will hold aloft the flag of your alma mater and make it proud.

India has had a very rich maritime history dating back to the 3rd millennium BCE when the denizens of the Indus Valley civilisation initiated maritime trading contacts with Mesopotamia. The world's first dock at Lothal in modern Gujarat (2400 BCE) was located away from the main sea currents to avoid deposition of silt, thereby indicating possession of considerable knowledge of oceanography, hydrography and maritime engineering. Kingdoms on the west coast of India engaged in active sea trade with ancient Persia, Arabia and Egypt, and through them with ancient Greece and Rome. Between 200 BCE and 1200 CE, kingdoms of eastern and southern India were engaged in active sea trade with what are now Burma, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam and established trading posts in these far off lands. The great 11th century Tamil king Rajendra Chola maintained a standing Navy and called the Bay of Bengal "the Chola Lake". The decline of Indian maritime power actually commenced in the thirteenth century, and it almost disappeared at about the same time that the sea power of the western nations became ascendant.

A new chapter in the history of Indian shipping began when a resolution was passed in the Central Legislative Assembly in 1926 recognising the need for the creation of a Training Institution to cater to the Indian Mercantile Marine. This gave birth to *Training Ship Dufferin*, which was followed by *Training Ship*

Rajendra (named after the great Chola King) and later replaced by a shore based establishment, the *Training Ship Chanakya*. In 1947, the newly independent country's founders foresaw the need for modern merchant marine engineering training. This led to the setting up of two Institutes of the Directorate of Marine Engineering Training (DMET) at Mumbai (in 1949) and Kolkata (in 1953) which were subsequently renamed as the '*Marine Engineering Research Institutes*' (MERI) of Kolkata and Mumbai. It was recognised that a continuing education and training programme was necessary to upgrade the skill set of maritime officers on board vessels. In pursuance of this objective, the Government of India established the premier post-sea training Institute called *Lal Bahadur Shastri College of Advanced Maritime Studies & Research, Mumbai* in 1948. These four Institutes have supplied a large number of highly professional maritime personnel who have won global recognition for their hard work, efficiency, dedication and intelligence and who are in great demand by shipping companies both Indian and foreign.

Later, in order to cater to the requirements of indigenous ship design and research, the Government of India founded the *National Ship Design and Research Centre in Visakhapatnam* in 1991. Similarly, the *Indian Institute of Port Management* at Kolkata (1965) and the *National Institute of Port Management* at Chennai (1985) (later renamed as National Maritime Academy) were set up to fulfil the essential requirements of port management.

India, as all of you are aware, is blessed with a long coast line of more than 7,500 kms, and 95% of the country's trade by volume, and 70% by value, is handled through the sea. In spite of this, only about 10% of our trade is carried out through Indian ships and our share of global seafarers is only 6%. The ships manufactured in India carry even less cargo. If India is to emerge as a major economic power in future, it would require substantial stepping up in the out-turn of quality maritime personnel and addition to our ship-building capacity. Ship-building has the potential to generate a lot of employment, both in rural and urban areas. The Govt. of India is committed to strengthening the shipping industry in the country because of its potential. In the Maritime Agenda 2020 of the Government of India, a target of enhancing the share of Indian seafarers in international shipping from the current level of 6% to 9% by the year 2015 has been envisaged.

It was with the objective of providing quality personnel against the backdrop of a mounting demand for professionals in marine engineering, nautical sciences, shipbuilding & repairs, etc that the Indian Maritime University was formed. Headquartered at Chennai and with an all-India jurisdiction, it was established by an Act of Parliament in 2008, encompassing within its fold the seven legacy government Maritime Institutes.

I hope that the IMU shall, in future, lay stress on integrating theories with practice. I would urge the University to study the international and national best practices in port and shipping management, logistics and transportation, marine environmental management, maritime risk and system safety, maritime administration (covering law, policy and security) and train academics as well as professionals in these areas. And last but not the least, I would like to see more women seafarers.

The Indian Maritime University is the youngest of the Central Universities in India. I am aware that it has faced several teething problems. There has been a high rate of turnover of faculty and administrative staff over the last five years. Many of the Faculty positions are yet to be filled up. I am, however, confident that the University has a bright future ahead. It is my fond hope that the IMU should aspire to become a Centre of Excellence in the medium term. I foresee a time when the Indian Maritime University will be contributing meaningfully to nation building in general and to the maritime sector in particular.

The strength of a University is judged by its alumni. Thousands of mariners have passed out from the seven legacy institutions which were subsumed in the Indian Maritime University, and these alumni must all feel that they belong to this University and work toward strengthening it by creating endowments. I would urge each one of you graduating today not to forget your debt to your university, society and country and strive to work for the advancement of all three.

I wish you all the very best.

Jai Hind.