

**National Seminar on ASEAN-India Maritime Cooperation**  
**31 January 2014**

**Opening Address of Amb. Shyam Saran, Chairman, RIS and NSAB**

Shri Anil Wadhwa, Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs, Dr Prabir De, Coordinator, ASEAN-India Centre at the RIS, Ms. Renu Pall, Joint Secretary (ASEAN) in the MEA, Ambassador V.S. Seshadri, Adviser, RIS and former Ambassador to Myanmar, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of the ASEAN-India Centre and our co-sponsor the Indian National Shipowner's Association, let me extend a warm welcome to all the distinguished speakers and participants at this National Seminar on India-ASEAN Maritime Transport Cooperation.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to Shri Anil Wadhwa, who has recently taken up his assignment as Secretary (East) in MEA. On behalf of the ASEAN-India Centre, I would like to express my sincere thanks to him for gracing this Seminar with his presence and for consenting to inaugurate this Seminar and to share with us his perspective on India-ASEAN relations and the challenge of establishing connectivity, in the widest sense between the two friendly and strategic partners.

The ASEAN-India Centre has been established at RIS pursuant to a decision taken by the Heads of State/Government at the India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit held in December 2012. Its mandate is to contribute to the strengthening of relations in various aspects between the two sides. The promotion of all-round connectivity is one of the priority areas where enhanced cooperation is envisaged. Connectivity, in this sense, covers cross-border road, rail, air and digital connectivity, as well as maritime links. India has welcomed the Master Plan on ASEAN connectivity as well as the ASEAN ICT Master Plan 2015. Our effort is to align our plans for cross-border linkages with these important and ambitious platforms for regional integration. The ASEAN Connectivity Coordinating Committee (ACCC) has opened a comprehensive dialogue with India in 2013 to enhance all-round connectivity between India and ASEAN countries. It is against this background that the ASEAN-India Centre decided to focus attention on maritime links between our India and its ASEAN partners. In order to meet the ambitious targets for trade, the availability of regular, efficient and affordable shipping is of critical importance.

The Centre has prepared a comprehensive and a very informative background paper on India-ASEAN Maritime Connectivity, which has been circulated to those taking

part in the panel discussions. Participants at this Seminar who wish to receive copies of the paper may register their e-mails with the Reception Desk. The paper will also be put on the RIS Website, so you can access it easily.

From the paper, it is apparent that the maritime links between Indian ports and ports in ASEAN countries remain a weak link in our effort to promote closer economic and commercial relations between our countries. Shipping services are irregular and service only a few major ports, thereby necessitating a great deal of transshipment activity. On the Indian side, cargo-handling capacity at our ports is limited and unable to cope with the rising volume of both incoming and outgoing cargo. Indian shipping carries only a limited share of India's maritime trade and this is a cause of concern. There is an urgent need to modernize our ports, reduce the turn around time for ships and expand the capacity to handle containerized cargo. We need more modern, efficient and containerized shipping and reuse the declining share of Indian shipping in our maritime trade.

We must acknowledge that in shipping sector several ASEAN countries are ahead of India and Singapore is one of the world's leading ports and container terminals. Other ASEAN countries are making rapid progress in modernizing and expanding their ports and shipping services. India must keep pace with these developments even as it seeks to establish closer maritime links with its South East Asian neighbors.

Both India and ASEAN are maritime nations, with a rich and glorious history of maritime trade. The seas that wash our shores, constituted an ancient maritime highway that nurtured a long and sustained exchange of goods, peoples, ideas and cultures among our peoples. It must be our endeavor to revive and energize those ancient links in a contemporary setting, so that they become a driving force in the Asian resurgence that we are witnessing today.

I have no doubt that this Seminar will explore the many dimensions of the challenge we face in establishing a dense network of maritime links among our countries and generate recommendations which could become valuable inputs into the inter-governmental processes that are already engaged in promoting India-ASEAN maritime cooperation.

I wish the Seminar every success.