Attacks on ships, seafarers 'unacceptable': EAM

- India announces $5,00,000 financial grant to IORA

NEW DELHI, Nov 27 (PTI)

THE Indian Ocean is central to global trade, energy security and connectivity and all littoral states in the region must jointly work towards its safety, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Friday as he described increasing attacks on maritime shipping and seafarers as "simply unacceptable".

In an address at a ministerial conclave of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Jaishankar also called for respecting maritime laws, especially UNCLOS (the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea) -- remarks that came amid growing contestation in the global maritime sphere, including China's military muscle-flexing in the South China Sea.

Reaffirming its commitment to strengthen IORA, India announced a grant of USD 5,00,000 towards the grouping's institutional and financial capacity-building, according to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

India hosted the conclave in New Delhi in its capacity as the current chair of the IORA that comprises 23 nations including Australia, Indonesia, South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Somalia, Oman, Yemen, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Thailand. The US, the European Union and several other dialogue partners of the IORA also joined the gathering.

In his remarks, Jaishankar delved into what he called the "volatile aspects of a transforming global order" and highlighted the adverse impacts of conflicts, frictions and disruptions.

"The Indian Ocean is particularly poised to address its challenges. Recognising the criticality of maritime trade to global growth, we must deliver on its safety and security. International Law, particularly UNCLOS, must be respected," he said.

The External Affairs Minister said attacks on maritime shipping and seafarers are "simply unacceptable" and that they call for a global response.

Jaishankar's comments came against the backdrop of mounting global concerns over attacks on merchant shipping in West Asia as well as in the Black Sea in which several Indian sailors were killed.

"Whether it is to counter terrorism, narcotics trade or illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, or indeed response to climate events and disaster situations, we have to become more self-reliant as well as more enthusiastic about cooperating with partners," he said.

Fresh delimitation-linked women quota bill gets Cabinet approval

Govt has agreed to raise the Lok Sabha seats by 50 per cent for every State to address the concerns of southern States. There will be a freeze on seats till 2051.

Government has proposed to redraw Parliamentary constituencies without altering the number of seats for each State. The proposed amendment seeks to increase the strength of the Lok Sabha from the present 543 seats to a maximum of 850 through delimitation.

NEW DELHI, Nov 27 (PTI)

THE Union Cabinet on Friday cleared a fresh delimitation-linked women's reservation bill to effect a uniform 50 per cent rise in Lok Sabha seats in all States and is likely to bring it before the special sitting of Parliament beginning next week.

Sources said the Union Cabinet accorded its nod to the fresh bill with some amendments to ensure that no State loses its representation in the Lok Sabha in proportion to other States after delimitation.

They said that the Government has agreed to raise the Lok Sabha seats by 50 per cent for every State to address the concerns of southern States. There will be a freeze on seats till 2051. The fresh bill seeks to use the 2011 Census to redraw the increased seats. The Government has proposed to redraw Parliamentary constituencies without altering the number of seats for each State, sources said.

The proposed amendment seeks to increase the strength of the Lok Sabha from the present 543 seats to a maximum of 850 through delimitation. The treasury benches said the move will pave the way for the implementation of 33 per cent reservation for women in Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies ahead of the 2029 general election.

The Cabinet meeting was chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and was convened at 1 pm at Sewa Teerth. The bill was brought in Parliament by the Government during a special sitting in April, but it could not be passed as the ruling dispensation could not muster strength in the Lok Sabha.

The Government has now claimed that it has the numbers to get the legislation through.

A two-thirds majority in both houses of Parliament is a must for a Constitutional amendment bill to get cleared. Sources said the DMK and NCP, besides BRS, are expected to support the bill.

The Opposition INDIA bloc is against the legislation and will be

(Contd on page 5)

Kharge convenes Oppn leaders meet today; DMK invited, NCP (SP) to skip

NEW DELHI, Nov 27 (PTI)

LEADER of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge has invited all Opposition floor leaders to attend a meeting at his residence on Saturday to devise a joint strategy in view of the Government's likely move to reintroduce a constitutional amendment bill in Parliament, involving delimitation, sources said.

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While INDIA bloc parties' floor leaders in Parliament will be present, non-INDIA bloc Opposition parties such as the DMK, the AAP and the BJD, among others, have also been invited for the meeting, they said. Sources said the meeting would be held at 11:30 AM at Kharge's 10, Rajaji Marg residence on Saturday.

NCP (SP) working president Supriya Sule said she would not attend the INDIA bloc meeting as her father Sharad Pawar was ailing.

As Pawar was in hospital, she would stay in Mumbai during the

(Contd on page 5)

India registers record foodgrain production of 378.53 MT in 2025-26

NEW DELHI, Nov 27 (IANS)

INDIA registered a record 378.53 million tonnes of foodgrain production in 2025–26, which represents an increase of a whopping 208.06 lakh tonnes over the production of 3577.32 lakh tonnes recorded in 2024-25, according to the final crop estimates released on Thursday by Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan.

Addressing a press conference here, the Minister also said that despite serious weather-related challenges, including El Nino and a delay in the monsoon, India's kharif foodgrain production in 2026-27 is estimated at 1671.43 lakh metric tonnes. This is 97.67 lakh tonnes higher than the average production recorded over the previous five years, reflecting the resilience and determination of the country's farmers, he added.

Chouhan said that India was not only meeting its domestic food requirements but also making a substantial contribution to feeding the world.

INDIAN OCEAN RIM ASSOCIATION MINISTERIAL CONCLAVE

Indian Ocean key to global trade, energy, need greater coordination: Jaishankar

India announces USD 500,000 grant; proposals for two Centres of Excellence in Goa and Gujarat get endorsement

Shubhajit Roy
New Delhi, November 27

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS Minister S Jaishankar underlined Friday that the Indian Ocean is "central to global trade, energy security, connectivity and economic prosperity" and told the ministers from the Indian Ocean regional grouping that achieving this would require "greater coordination" among member countries and "meaningful collaboration" with dialogue partners.

This comes days after NSA Ajit Doval flagged at the Colombo Security Conclave in Male on November 25 the "serious security challenges" in the Indian Ocean region and assured that India is "committed" to continue working closely with the member countries to "enhance our collective capacities" and will try to give "all necessary help and assistance".

According to a statement by the MEA, "As part of India's efforts to strengthen institutional cooperation and promote capacity-building within IORA, the Council of Ministers endorsed India's proposals for the establishment of two IORA Centres of Excellence: IORA Digital Innovation Hub at the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) — National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), Goa, focusing on ocean sciences, and IORA Centre of Excellence in Maritime Law at Rashtriya Raksha University (RRU), Gujarat, India."

Also, reaffirming its commitment to strengthening IORA, "India announced a grant of USD 500,000 towards the Association's institutional and financial capacity-building", it said.

According to the joint statement, the Delhi communique, it said, "We reaffirm our commitment to maintaining the Indian Ocean as a region of peace, stability and prosperity, and to upholding applicable international law, including applicable international law of the sea to ensure freedom of navigation and overflight, unimpeded commerce, peaceful settlement of disputes and other lawful uses of the sea."



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar at Indian Ocean Rim Association conclave in New Delhi on Friday. PTI

Without mentioning and ascribing blame to any side, it said, "We express concern over the undermining of maritime safety and security of vessels and seafarers and call for ensuring their safety and security."

China's assertive behaviour in the Indo-Pacific and the Indian Ocean region has been a concern for many in the region including India. In recent months, the war in West Asia has led to security implications with the US attacking Iranian ships and submarines in the Indian Ocean region, and Iranians also counter-attacking ships.

"The meeting concluded with the adoption of the Delhi Communiqué 2026, reflecting the steadfast commitment of IORA Member States to a peaceful, stable and prosperous Indian Ocean," MEA said.

Addressing the ministerial conclave of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in New Delhi, Jaishankar said that at a time of significant geopolitical changes, IORA "must enhance its collective voice and reinforce its role as a regional platform".

"The Indian Ocean is central to global trade, energy security, connectivity and economic prosperity. It is also a region of immense diversity, opportunity and shared challenges. India's approach to IORA and India's Chairship of the Association is guided by vision MAHASAGAR, building on our earlier vision SAGAR," he said.

"Achieving these requires greater coordination among member states, meaningful collaboration with dialogue partners and a stronger focus on practical cooperation," he said.

US Ambassador Sergio Gor, who also spoke at the meeting, said in a post on X, "I reaffirmed America's commitment to freedom of navigation and cooperation on maritime security, energy, infrastructure, and critical minerals. Open sea lanes are essential to global trade and prosperity."

India is hosting the meeting in its capacity as the current chair of the IORA that comprises 23 nations.

Terming the attacks on maritime shipping and seafarers as "simply unacceptable", Jaishankar said they call for a global response.

India's power sector needs Rs 200 lakh cr by 2047: Minister

Press Trust of India
New Delhi, November 27

INDIA'S POWER sector will need investments to the tune of Rs 200 lakh crore until 2047 to achieve various targets, Union minister Manohar Lal said on Friday, and called for stock market listings of state-owned firms and participation from private players to raise funds.

Speaking at the Power Ministers' Conference of States and Union Territories here, Lal emphasised the need for the Centre and states to work as a team to tackle challenges related to transmission of renewable energy.

The power minster also said that the total loss of discoms across the country has reached Rs 7 lakh crore again, even after the central government absorbed about the same amount of losses in 2017 through UDAY (Ujjwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana), a financial package scheme for revival of power distribution companies (discoms).

"We absorbed about Rs 7 lakh crore loss under the UDAY scheme in 2017. Losses of discoms of the entire nation have again reached Rs 7 lakh crore," he said. He also pointed out that last year, all discoms together earned a profit of Rs 2,600 crore.

US pushed Iraq & Venezuela to consider leaving OPEC: Report

London/Baghdad/Houston: The Trump administration encouraged Venezuela and Iraq to consider leaving OPEC earlier this year and prevented Venezuela from paying its annual membership dues to the group, according to 10 people familiar with the matter.

The previously unreported moves targeted two of OPEC's five founding members, marking an unusually direct challenge to an organisation President Donald Trump has long accused of keeping oil prices artificially high.

US officials were pushing for greater oil production and investment in both countries at the time, and some worried OPEC production limits could eventually constrain those ambitions, according to people familiar with the discussions.

The US pressure on Venezuela went far enough that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman intervened this summer, persuading the Trump administration not to press the issue further, two people familiar with the matter said. In Iraq, PM Ali Faleh al-Zaidi raised the possibility of leaving OPEC at a govt meeting this summer after discussions with US officials who encouraged the idea, two people

PRESSURE TACTICS

familiar with the matter said. Iraq's oil ministry pushed back, persuading al-Zaidi to keep Iraq in the group and consider seeking a higher production quota instead, the people said.

The US has powerful leverage over both countries. The US controls Venezuela's access to state funds following the Jan ouster of Nicolas Maduro, while Iraq's oil revenues continue to pass through an account at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, a relic of the 2003 Iraq War.

The US state department did not answer questions about whether it had prevented Venezuela from paying its OPEC membership fee. But it confirmed Washington has the power to decide on Venezuela's use of state funds, now held in a US-controlled account set up after Maduro's removal. The official said that it was possible that lower-level US officials had raised the question of leaving OPEC with Venezuela's govt earlier this year, but that "it has not been among the issues raised by high-level officials."

The state department's conversations with Iraq, meanwhile, "have focused on improving energy infrastructure to increase production and transportation of energy, not OPEC," the official said. Representatives for OPEC and for the govts of Venezuela, Iraq, Saudi Arabia did not respond to requests for comment. REUTERS

CDS: China helping Pak boost space capability

'Will Have To Factor It Into Our Calculus'

Surendra.Singh@timesofindia.com

New Delhi: Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General N S Raja Subramani said Friday that Pakistan's space capability is "improving" with China's help, and Pakistan Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission, the national space agency of Pakistan, is also "working to develop its own capability". He asserted that India needs to factor in these developments to enhance its space capabilities.

While replying to media queries during an address on 'Future of warfare and India's preparedness to conduct multi-domain operations', Gen Subramani said, "We also have to take it for granted that Pakistan will be helped by the Turkish too, and whatever capabilities are available with the Chinese in terms of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), positional navigation, timing, etc., will be available to the Pakistanis, so that we will have to factor in into our calculus. Their ISR will be better... we will have to look at enhancing our capabilities."



Gen Raja Subramani's comments came in response to China launching its Shenzhou-24 crewed spaceship carrying 3 astronauts, including a Pakistani astronaut

The CDS said when India's Space-Based Surveillance Phase-III (SBS-3) programme becomes operational, it will "enhance our capabilities to a great extent". SBS-3, approved by Cabinet Committee on Security, is a national space programme to deploy 52 reconnaissance and surveillance satellites to strengthen the India's land, air, and maritime domain awareness across its borders and the Indian Ocean Region.

"Simultaneously, we are working on methods to ensure we are able to build, as also launch more satellites. We are also working with our private sector and entrepreneurs," he added.

His comments came in response to a media query on China successfully launching its Shenzhou-24 crewed spaceship, carrying three astronauts, including Pakistan's Muhammad Zeeshan Ali, last Wednesday.

During his address, the CDS said the distinction between war and peace is "blurring" today, and there is a "continuous state of contestation", asserting that efforts are on to modernise the electronic warfare architecture of the military. "We are being subjected to cognitive warfare by an adversary in an insidious way", and emphasised bolstering capabilities in all domains.

He also cited Op Sindoor, terming its second phase an excellent example of joint, integrated, multi-domain operations, and asserted that India not only had control over the escalation matrix, but it also resulted in a "decisive victory" for India.

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