Keynote Address: Maritime SheEO Conference 2026
Event: 7th Edition, Maritime SheEO Conference 2026
Date: October 22, 2026
Venue: JW Marriott Sahar, Mumbai (Grand Ballroom / Lighthouse Hall)
Speaker: Sameer Khare (Retd. IAS), Chairman, National Shipping Board, Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways

I. Opening & Welcome: The National Horizon of Women-Led Development

Distinguished guests, fellow leaders on the dais, Sanjam Sahi Gupta, and delegates from across the global maritime fraternity—namaskar and a very good morning.

It is a genuine privilege to address the seventh edition of the **Maritime SheEO Conference**. When we look at the thematic anchor of this year's gathering— ***"She Owns. She Builds. She Invests"—***we are capturing a profound national momentum. Across India, from pioneering social empowerment schemes like ***Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*** **and** ***Ladli Lakshmi*** that secure the girl child's future, to mandatory reservations for women in grassroots local bodies, our nation has firmly transitioned from women's development to **women-led development**. As India's maritime sector charts its historic course under **Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047**, one truth stands absolute: **we cannot sail into a developed economic future with only half of our talent pool on board.**

II. National Transformation: From Defence & Sainik Schools to Maritime Statues

For decades, maritime governance, ship operations, and port logistics functioned as traditional bastions of exclusion. Today, that structural bottleneck is shifting—and the momentum is visible across the entire national architecture. Look at how far we have come in national defence: we have deliberately broken historical barriers by opening the doors of **Sainik Schools** to young girls, welcoming female cadets into the National Defence Academy, and placing women officers at the forefront of the **Army, Navy, and Air Force**—where they command units, fly fighter jets, and serve onboard warships.

That very same national resolve must now decisively drive our blue economy. Under **Section 4 of the Merchant Shipping Act, 2025**, the statutory framework governing the National Shipping Board explicitly mandates that out of the nominated members representing the Central Government, shipowners, seafarers,

and allied interests, **at least four members must be women**. This is not merely a symbolic guideline; it is a foundational legal requirement that institutionalizes gender representation at the apex policy-making tier of Indian shipping. Diversity in shipping is not a corporate social responsibility checkbox or a peripheral HR initiative; **it is core administrative and economic infrastructure.** When we embed female leadership directly into our statutory boards, we fundamentally enhance safety standards, workforce retention, and governance across the maritime sector.

III. Synergy: Decarbonization, Digitalization, and Talent

We stand at a critical crossroads globally. The International Maritime Organization's net-zero frameworks, tightening environmental regulations, and the complex realities of alternative marine fuels demand radical innovation. **Innovation does not stem from homogenous thinking.** It requires diverse perspectives to solve complex, cross-border regulatory and technical challenges—from navigating compliance tightropes to implementing green shipping corridors. Furthermore, platforms like the **Maritime SheEO Conference** and parallel tracks like ***AnchorCon*** are bridging the vital gap between academia, commercial enterprise, and regulatory bodies. By actively integrating our students, nurturing young women cadets, and celebrating milestones—such as **Ceyline's 40 years of service** or the invaluable research from organizations like **The Seafarers' Charity**—we are building a resilient, future-ready workforce.

IV. Call to Action & Conclusion

To the leaders, executives, policymakers, and young delegates gathered here today: the momentum is with us, but the pace of transformation must accelerate. Let us match the trailblazing progress seen in our armed forces by fully harnessing the legal mandates of the Merchant Shipping Act, 2025, ensuring that our institutional frameworks proactively champion women as owners, builders, and investors in the maritime sector.

I congratulate Sanjam Sahi Gupta and the entire Maritime SheEO team for sustaining this vital platform year after year. May this conference spark bold partnerships, challenge status quos, and inspire the next generation of maritime leaders.

Thank you, and I wish you a deeply productive and inspiring conference.

Jai Hind, jai bharat.