KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Event: 17th Edition of South East CEO Conclave & Awards 2026

Date: July 22, 2026

Venue: ITC Grand Chola, Chennai

Speaker: Mr. Sameer Kumar Khare, IAS (Retd.), Chairperson, National Shipping Board

Opening and Commendation of SECC:

Distinguished stalwarts of the maritime fraternity, captains of industry, policy experts, and my esteemed colleague Shri Gopal Krishna Ji, a very good evening to all of you.

It is an honour to stand before you tonight at the **17th edition of the South East CEO Conclave & Awards**. For nearly two decades, SECC, championed by *EXIM India Shipping Times*, has established itself as the definitive vanguard of excellence, innovation, and best practices in the cargo, logistics, port, and marine sectors. Tonight is not just about celebration; it is a recognition of the grit and resilience of the shipping fraternity that keeps the wheels of global and domestic trade turning seamlessly. I congratulate all the nominees and award winners who have continuously elevated the benchmark for Indian logistics.

The Legacy of NSB: Wisdom in the Ocean, Progress in the Nation

As the Chairperson of the **National Shipping Board**, I look back with immense pride at the institutional legacy we represent. Established as a permanent statutory advisory body under the **Merchant Shipping Act of 1958**, the NSB has been the apex architect advising the Government of India on the development and optimization of our mercantile marine framework.

Since 1958, our role has steadily evolved from regulating traditional maritime practices to shaping holistic national policies. Today, the NSB serves as the vital institutional bridge linking the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways, line ministries, and core commercial stakeholders to ensure that India's maritime policies remain both pragmatic and globally competitive.

When we look at our mission, I am reminded of the deeply profound tagline of the NSB: **"समुद्रे प्रज्ञा, राष्ट्रे प्रगतिः"** (*Samudre Pragya, Rashtre Pragatih*) — *Wisdom in the ocean is the key to progress in the nation.*

This is not merely a motto; it is our strategic compass. Managing our vast maritime resources, shipping lanes, and trade networks with deep strategic *Pragya*—wisdom, foresight, and intellect—is exactly what unlocks the structural, sustainable, and economic

Pragati of our nation. Applying this wisdom to our oceans is our collective responsibility.

Scaling GOI Initiatives: Infrastructure, Modernisation & Efficiency

Under the visionary leadership of our Prime Minister, the Government of India has issued a clarion call to transform our logistics architecture. The rollout of the **PM GatiShakti National Master Plan** and the **National Logistics Policy (NLP)** have institutionalized a whole-of-government approach to integrated infrastructure development.

The central objective is clear: **we must drastically reduce logistics costs** to make Indian trade and industry globally competitive. High logistics overheads act as an indirect tax on our exporters, and reducing this burden is critical to our vision of an *Atmanirbhar Bharat*.

To achieve this, the government has launched a multi-pronged offensive across the maritime sector:

Port Modernisation & Infrastructure: Through massive capital investments and the expansion of the Sagarmala framework, we are actively modernising our port infrastructure, deepening drafts, and expanding capacities to handle the world's largest mega-vessels.

Operational Efficiency & Automation: Building infrastructure is only half the battle; maximizing its utility is the other. We are aggressively driving operational efficiency at our ports by minimizing turnaround times, eliminating manual bottlenecks, and introducing automated container handling systems.

Digitalisation & IT Integration: The future of logistics is digital. Through initiatives like the National Logistics Portal (Marine), the Unified Logistics Interface Platform (ULIP), and the integration of IoT, we are creating a transparent, paperless, and seamless supply chain ecosystem.

Greening Shipping and Logistics: As India marches toward its net-zero goals, greening our maritime sector is no longer optional. From promoting green hydrogen and ammonia as alternative fuels to developing green port guidelines, we are building a truly sustainable blue economy.

The Economic Imperative: Arresting Foreign Exchange Outgo

There is a profound economic driver behind these initiatives that we must openly address: **reducing our massive foreign exchange outgo**. Today, an overwhelmingly large share of India's international trade is carried on foreign-flagged vessels, leading to billions of dollars flowing out of our economy in freight payments every single year.

By scaling up our domestic fleet tonnage, expanding coastal shipping, modernising our ports, and refining our maritime policies, we aim to reverse this trend. Retaining this critical capital within our borders will strengthen our financial foundations and fuel domestic maritime reinvestment.

Mandate for the NSB Sub-Committee & Industry Collaboration

To address these challenges systematically, the NSB has established a dedicated **Sub-Committee on Logistics Cost Reduction**. Moving forward, we are focusing on three primary mandates:

Intermodal Integration: Enabling seamless documentation and infrastructural continuity across rail, road, and port networks to eliminate port congestion and lower handling charges.

Fiscal Stimulus & Infrastructure Parity: Recommending deeper structural reforms that treat shipping and coastal maritime networks as foundational infrastructure, simplifying asset financing and operating parameters.

Need for Further Collaboration: I invite the industry leaders present here today to aggressively collaborate with the NSB. We need your real-time field data, operational insights, and policy pain points to help us devise actionable, pragmatic advisory frameworks for the Ministry.

Navigating Geopolitical Tensions: The Pivot to South East Asia & Chennai's Role

We meet at a time of severe global uncertainty. Evolving **geopolitical conflicts and regional tensions** have severely disrupted traditional trade corridors, with the West Coast facing sustained logistical bottlenecks, rising freight insurance, and maritime transit challenges.

In this volatile landscape, the **South East Asian trade architecture emerges as India's critical engine of growth.** By de-risking our trade routes and intensifying our maritime corridors toward the ASEAN and broader Indo-Pacific geography, India can shield its trade networks and capture new market frontiers.

This brings me to our host city—**Chennai**. Strategically situated on the Coromandel Coast, Chennai is uniquely positioned to serve as the epicentre of this geopolitical pivot. Chennai is an industrial titan. With its robust automobile, manufacturing, and tech clusters, it has the infrastructure and geographical advantage to serve as a world-class **hub for port-led industrialization**. By scaling up automated container terminal operations and expanding regional multimodal logistics parks, Chennai will play a decisive role in pulling international supply chains closer to Indian shores.

Conclusion

The challenges before us are complex, but the opportunities are unprecedented. By combining the strategic oversight of the National Shipping Board, the execution of the Government, and the unmatched entrepreneurial brilliance represented in this room tonight, we can secure India’s rightful position as a global maritime leader.

Thank you once again to *EXIM India Shipping Times* and Shri Gopal Krishna Ji for having me. Have a wonderful evening of networking, and let us continue to move the nation forward, together.

Jai Hind. Jai Bharat.