



Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal Puts Global Partnerships, Youth & Women at the Heart of India's Maritime Future

Sonowal held Bilateral talks with Saudi Arabia, Belgium and Bhutan, to advance port investment, green shipping and regional connectivity

India's maritime future will be written by its young people: Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal

Minister of State Shantanu Thakur Held Bilateral Talks with Greece, Lithuania, Mozambique & Myanmar on Ports, Shipbuilding & Seafarer Skills

Posted On: 08 OCT 2026 7:58PM by PIB Delhi

Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW), Sarbananda Sonowal held bilateral meetings with Saudi Arabia, Belgium and Bhutan on Day 2 of Sagarmanthan: The Great Oceans Dialogue 2026, carrying India's maritime partnerships across the Gulf, Europe and the neighbourhood. He also placed young people and women at the centre of India's maritime journey.

With a delegation from the Saudi Ports Authority (Mawani), Sarbananda Sonowal discussed Saudi participation in Indian port projects such as VadHAVAN and Galathea Bay. The two sides also discussed cooperation in shipbuilding, seafarer training and resilient supply chains. Saudi Arabia expressed their interest to invest in India's port projects and in the Maritime Development Fund (MDF).

With **Flemish Minister for Mobility, Public Works, Ports and Sport, Annick De Ridder**, Sonowal proposed exploring a green shipping corridor linking Indian ports with Antwerp-Bruges. Both sides discussed green fuels, smart port technology, and dredging. VOC Port has signed an agreement with Port of Antwerp Port for training in capacity building in green shipping, and green fuel.

With **Lyonpo Chandra Bahadur Gurung, Minister of Infrastructure and Transport of Bhutan**, Sonowal highlighted National Waterway-2 and the Jogighopa terminal as Bhutan's gateway to global trade. The ministers discussed the potential of the Manas and Sankosh

rivers, and the connectivity with the national waterways for improved cargo movement. Both the ministers discussed maritime training for Bhutanese youth at the Centre of Excellence in Dibrugarh which is being developed.

"Our talks with Saudi Arabia, Belgium and Bhutan show how India's maritime partnerships are growing across regions," said **Sarbananda Sonowal**. "With Saudi Arabia, we are exploring investment in ports, shipbuilding and resilient supply chains. With Belgium, we are working towards a green shipping corridor and smarter ports. With Bhutan, we are opening the Brahmaputra as a gateway for our neighbour to reach global markets and build skills for its youth. Under the leadership of our visionary Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India is a trusted partner for a connected, green and prosperous maritime future."

At The Future is Blue: The Next Maritime Generation and Ocean Changemakers: Women, Youth and India's Maritime Journey, Sarbananda Sonowal heard from young Indians and women about their aspirations for the sector. The session had the participation of an all-women tri-service sailing expedition which inspired the women cadets.

Indian seafarers have grown from 1.27 lakh to 3.23 lakh in twelve years, taking India from fifth place in 2015 to world's second-largest supplier of seafarers, with over 12% of the global workforce. Active women seafarers have risen from 1,599 in 2021 to 7,033 in 2025, supported by the Sagar Mein Samman initiative. India aims to raise that share through Mission 20% by 2030. Shipyard-ITI partnerships now provide 150 hours of on-the-job training, and a structured six-month onboard programme for GP Rating and Maritime Catering trainees bridges pre-sea training and life at sea.

"India's maritime future will be written by the youth," said **Sarbananda Sonowal**. "Today, our seafarers are trusted and respected on every ocean, and more women than ever are choosing careers at sea. Under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, we are building the skills, institutions and opportunities so that every young Indian who dreams of the sea can help lead the world's maritime economy."

Day 2 also featured plenaries on securing global trade chokepoints, the Global South at the maritime table, AI in maritime, green ports, equity in ocean futures, BRICS+ connectivity and green shipbuilding.

Union Minister of State of MoPSW, Shantanu Thakur held bilateral meetings with Greece, Lithuania, Mozambique and Myanmar on the sidelines of Sagarmanthan 2026. Thakur held a bilateral meeting with **Stefanos Gkikas, Deputy Minister of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy of the Hellenic Republic (Greece)**, on strengthening India-Greece maritime cooperation. With **Lithuania's Minister of Transport and Communications, Juras Taminskas**, the minister proposed a work plan for the MoU between Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority and the Port of Klaipėda, and discussed direct shipping links and green port cooperation. With Mozambique's **Minister of Transport and Logistics, João Jorge Matlombe**, he offered India's expertise in ports, shipbuilding, ship repair and seafarer training. With **Myanmar's Deputy Minister of Transport, U Tun Lu**, he discussed the next phase of Sittwe Port, cross-border inland water trade and maritime safety in the Bay of Bengal.

"From the Baltic to the Bay of Bengal, India is ready to share its strengths in ports, shipbuilding and seafarer skills so that we can grow together with our partners," said **Shantanu Thakur**. "Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has emerged as a trusted maritime partner for nations across regions. Through cooperation in green shipping, connectivity and capacity building, we are working towards safe, open and prosperous seas for all," added **Thakur**.

Addressing a press conference at Sagarmanthan, Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has moved from maritime potential to maritime performance. The **Union Minister of State Shantanu Thakur** along with the **Secretary of MoPSW, Vijay Kumar** also accompanied the Union Minister during the press conference.

Over the last twelve years, port capacity has risen from 1,561 to 2,817 MTPA, cargo handled from 1,052 to 1,668 million tonnes and inland waterways cargo from 29 to 218 million tonnes, while median container vessel turnaround has fallen from 35 to 23 hours. He noted that Sagarmanthan has grown from 1,700+ delegates from 61 countries in 2024 to participation from more than 70 countries this year, including 10 visiting Ministers, and has produced 100+ publications that strengthen India's role as Vishwaguru for the global maritime order. Highlighting India's push to build green hydrogen, ammonia and methanol capacity so that Indian ports become green fuel bunkering hubs, in line with the Net Zero 2070 commitment, he called for turning dialogue into joint research, investment and technology partnerships. "India is ready to work with the world for safer seas, greener shipping and shared prosperity," **Sonowal** said.





MI/Indu

Read this release in: Urdu , हिन्दी , Tamil

Share

