

Oceans of opportunity



[INPHINITELY YOURS](#) - Shambhu S. Kumaran (The Philippine Star)
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There is absolutely no doubt that the Blue Economy has established itself as a driver of global economic growth, a role it will continue to play well into the future. Sustainably harnessing marine resources also contributes significantly to poverty alleviation, employment and food security as well as enhanced trade and connectivity.

Within the evolving framework of the Indo-Pacific, the Blue Economy will play a major role, especially for countries like India and the Philippines with our long coastlines and large fishing communities whose livelihoods depend on the seas.

Setting the stage for a comprehensive discourse on the evolving concept, Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi described his vision of the Blue Economy in 2015 as SAGAR, an Indian word that means the Ocean, and an acronym for “Security And Growth for All in the Region.” This was followed by India’s Indo-Pacific Vision in 2018, further developed through the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) of 2019.

IPOI aims to leverage the existing regional architecture to forge cooperative links with partners through practical measures in seven areas: Maritime Security; Maritime Ecology; Maritime Resources; Capacity Building and Resource Sharing; Disaster Risk Reduction and Management; S&T and Academic Cooperation; and Trade, Connectivity and Maritime Transport.

For its part, India has placed the Blue Economy high on its agenda for economic growth, putting in place enabling policies in key maritime sectors and driving synergies across a range of stakeholders such as business, industry, academia and local communities. Central to this effort is an enhanced focus on technology, especially use of digital applications. The

results have been encouraging. India is today the third largest producer of fish and second largest exporter of aquaculture products globally.

All of this opens up immense opportunities for bilateral cooperation between India and the Philippines. Three initiatives taken recently have opened concrete pathways for implementing our Blue Economy cooperation.

First, availing of new business opportunities. On May 27, 2021, the first-ever India-Philippines Virtual Business Conference on Marine Fisheries and Aquaculture saw enthusiastic participation from representatives of the fisheries industry of both countries.

The conference identified three sectors of interest: aquaculture, where India has considerable expertise, as well as fish canning (especially tuna) and seaweed farming, where the Philippines has acknowledged strengths. Following the conference, our businesses are already moving ahead and forging valuable connections.

Second, academic collaboration. The scale of opportunities and challenges posed by the Blue Economy demands skilled and qualified human resources. An educational tie-up between the International Maritime University of India and the Batangas State University led by its dynamic president, Dr. Tirso Ronquillo, covering naval architecture, marine engineering and port management is being institutionalized.

A scoping meeting in May 2021 between the India's Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute and the Batangas State University's Apolinario R. Apacible School of Fisheries identified seaweed, aquaculture, microalgae culture, climate change and marine bio-diversity as areas for structured engagement. Such academic collaborations will facilitate joint research, sharing of best practices, syllabus development and exchange of students as well as faculty.

Third, enhancing livelihoods of local fishing communities through use of new technology. Declining catch and higher cost of fishing due to increase in input cost are affecting millions of fisherfolk in India and the Philippines. Efficient harnessing of marine resources requires innovation, use of new technologies, investments in maritime-related ICT as well as effective extension systems.

As democracies, we recognize the importance of putting people first; a people-centric approach with benefits to the broader community will always be an essential metric of success. Last month, I was delighted to visit the beautiful Islands of Sitio Iba off Nasugbu and Tingloy off Mabini. My

interactions with the local fisherfolk as well as Mayor Antonio Barcelon of Nasugbu and Mayor Lauro Alvarez of Tingloy revealed strong interest in a pilot India-Philippines development cooperation project for enhancing productivity of local fishing communities using Indian digital technology. The soon to be implemented project meets both benchmarks of popular participation and leveraging new technologies to raise productivity.

With such people-centric, business-driven, knowledge-based and technology-led initiatives, India and the Philippines can mutually support each other's efforts to develop a prosperous, sustainable and equitable fisheries and marine sector. Given the growing salience of the maritime domain in our two countries, these and other synergistic engagements in the Blue Economy will help our countries ensure the oceans of opportunity are within our reach.

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Shambhu S. Kumaran is the ambassador of India to the Philippines.

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