

# MAKING WAVES

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<u>Editorial Team</u>	<u>Address</u>
Capt JS Shergill, NM Cdr Rikeesh Sharma Mr Jithin S George	National Maritime Foundation Varuna Complex, NH-8, Airport Road New Delhi-110010, India Email: <a href="mailto:maritimeindia@gmail.com">maritimeindia@gmail.com</a> Visit us at: <a href="http://maritimeindia.org">maritimeindia.org</a>

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OFF THIS BLOCK, LOCK, STOCK AND BARREL

By Sandeep Dixit

By withdrawing from an oil exploration block in the South China Sea, India might have extricated itself from a messy 50-year-old territorial dispute involving multiple players in a region in which the diplomatic cost of staying on would have been more than the commercial benefit.

The area from which India recently withdrew is in Vietnam's exclusive economic zone (EEZ). But it also crosses over the “nine-dotted line” claimed by China. A vocal section of the Indian strategic community is not convinced, but India has been steadfast in insisting that it withdrew — “suspended operations” — from Block 128, three years after it surrendered the adjacent Block 127 because there was not enough oil to justify investment in the infrastructure for extraction.

Posturing

For the past five years or so, India and Vietnam have diplomatically duelled with China over rights to conduct hydrocarbon survey near a sensitive base of the People Liberation Army's Navy (PLAN). But the differences have rarely got out of hand.

The closest the two sides came to squaring off was reported by a U.K.-based newspaper in 2011 when PLAN “questioned” an Indian Naval Ship transiting from one Vietnamese port to another. Indian diplomats deny the incident took place, taking recourse to the concept of “anomalous propagation conditions.” By which they mean that the Chinese might have been questioning another vessel, and the chatter was picked up by the Indian Navy's Amphibious Warfare Vessel, INS Airavat. When reported to higher-ups, it was mistakenly presumed as having taken place between the Chinese and the Indian ships.

PLAN might or might not have “buzzed” INS Airavat, but there is no denying that China has been jumpy since 2006 when India signed the exploration agreement for Blocks 127 and 128 in the Phu Khanh Basin. The basin

is off the shore of northern Vietnam, not far away from the Hainan submarine base.

In 2009, when an Oil and Natural Gas Company Ltd. (ONGC) contracted company was surveying the Basin, Beijing eschewed confrontation. The company's Holland-based management was called to the Chinese Embassy in the Hague and told to stop operations. But it made no further protests when ONGC, backed by assurances from Hanoi, asked the company to complete its work.

Two years before this incident, the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi served a *démarche* after India began moving heavy equipment into the allotted blocks in the Phu Khanh Basin. India turned to Vietnam which submitted a signed statement claiming sovereignty over the portion of the sea in dispute. This was passed on to the Chinese Embassy along with a note stating that in view of the Vietnamese letter, the Chinese had no legal basis to claim ownership over some portions of Blocks 127 and 128. The Chinese left it at that.

The last two years have been different. In 2010, the dispute moved on to diplomatic centre stage after the United States became an Observer to the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), half of whose 10 members are in dispute with China over patches of South China Sea. Simultaneously most parties to the dispute, which is centred not on the Phu Khanh Basin but the Spratly Islands, began beefing up their military postures.

The Philippines has a long airstrip on Spratly Islands where its heavy military transport aircraft now land regularly. Malaysia, Vietnam and Taiwan have also built shorter airstrips on islands they have occupied. The resultant tensions began reflecting in the exchanges between India and China, some carrying the seeds of a worsening of bilateral ties at a time when both countries have a never-before-full plate of cooperation.

#### *Four points in defence*

All along, Indian diplomats defended taking up the contract on four grounds viz. (1) that Vietnam has always claimed the two blocks in the Phu Khanh Basin are in its exclusive economic zone and continental shelf; (2) though India has been involved in drilling for gas in the South China Sea since 1988, China began raising objections only in mid-2000; (3) that as half of India's trade

passes through the South China Sea, the contract for drilling in the two blocks underscored New Delhi's claim to unfettered access; and (4) India should pay back China in its backyard for being involved in heavy construction activity in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, which even the United Nations accepts is disputed territory.

But it also needs to be said that when India signed a gas exploration contract with Vietnam in 1988, it was for two blocks (Lan Tay and Lan Do) in the Nam Con Son Basin, close to the Natuna Sea near Indonesian territorial waters. Phu Khanh, on the other hand, is up north, roughly equidistant between the Vietnam coast and Hainan Island where China has a large submarine base.

As for having a stake in unfettered navigation rights in South China Sea, this is more an issue for South Korea and Japan who have been active in resolving it for a decade. Even otherwise, the issue of open sea lanes of communication (SLOC) in the South China Sea is not relevant to hydrocarbon exploration in the Phu Khanh Basin where, due to its location as a virtual maritime cul-de-sac, is not on a transit merchant shipping route.

On the other hand, China may claim consistency in objecting to any commercial activity in the area known as the “cow's tongue” of the South China Sea, irrespective of the midwife's role played by Vietnam or the Philippines.

### India-Vietnam ties

Observers have noted that Beijing ratcheted up the pitch ever since Vietnam and India resolved to enter into a tighter military embrace. India has increased the number of slots in military training courses for Vietnamese army officers and there is hardly any official delegation from Hanoi that does not contain high ranking military officers. Vietnam's request for transfer of Brahmos missiles has been pending for quite some time along with submarine training, conversion training for its pilots to fly the fighter jet, the Sukhoi-30, modernisation of a strategic port and sale of medium-sized warships. But having armed Pakistan, China is on a weak wicket in frowning at the transfer of military arms between the two nations.

The benefits that will come from the “suspension [of drilling in Phu Khanh Basin] purely on commercial considerations,” as a high ranking official insisted, could outweigh the joy of making China endure diplomatic pinpricks for its

role in the disputed area of northern Kashmir. In February this year, both sides agreed to cooperate in maritime security and oceanography research. Both sides have major stakes in cooperating on both aspects. Cooperation in maritime security has begun and India can only gain by joining hands with China in exploring an Indian Ocean ridge, something it has been unable to do despite having given permission 15 years earlier.

Source: [The Hindu](#), 22 May



### PRINCE ANDREW VISITS INS VIRAAT AT THE WESTERN NAVAL COMMAND HEADQUARTERS IN MUMBAI

Prince Andrew, the Duke of York, who was on a week-long visit to India to commemorate the diamond jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation, visited the Western Naval Command Headquarters in Mumbai on Wednesday, 2 May. Prince Andrew, himself a naval officer in the Royal Navy, visited the Indian Navy's Aircraft Carrier INS Viraat (ex-HMS Hermes) where he walked around the ship and interacted with the officers and men on board.

Prince Andrew joined the Royal Navy in 1978, underwent training as a helicopter pilot and was part of the 820 Naval Air Squadron onboard the Royal Navy aircraft carrier HMS Invincible. During this tenure he saw action in the Falklands War where he flew on various missions and also witnessed the Argentinean attack on the SS Atlantic Conveyor. He was decorated for his service in the Falklands. In February 2010, he was promoted to Honorary Rear Admiral.

Source: [NDTV](#), 2 May

### PRINCE ANDREW VISITS KOHIMA

Prince Andrew paid homage to the hundreds of soldiers of the Allied Forces who fell in the fierce battle of Kohima in 1944 in the Second World War at the Commonwealth War Cemetery in Kohima. He is the first person from the royal family to visit the war cemetery constructed in memory of soldiers of the Allied Forces.

Source: [NDTV](#), 2 May

### **CHINESE NAVAL SHIP DOCKS AT KOCHI PORT ON GOODWILL VISIT**

A training vessel of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), Zheng He, on a goodwill voyage around the world, docked at Kochi on 09 May 12. Rear Admiral Liao Shining, Deputy Chief of Naval Staff of the PLAN, is on board the visiting vessel as the Task Commander. Chinese Ambassador to India Zhang Yan and Chinese Defence Attaché Major General Cai Ping visited the city in connection with the arrival of the vessel.

The Chinese ship was received at the berth by Indian Navy officials, with the Southern Naval Command band in attendance. Later, the Chinese Ambassador, accompanied by Task Force Commander, Senior Captain Jiang Guoping, Superintendent of China's Dalian Naval Academy and Captain Fan Kuizu met Rear Admiral Sudarshan Y Shrikhande, Chief of Staff of the Southern Naval Command and Officiating Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Southern Naval Command.

Over 300 Chinese Navy soldiers and delegates from other countries are taking part in the expedition undertaken by the Chinese Navy a decade after the last such voyage. Indian Navy's Sea Cadet David Veeravalli sailed aboard the Chinese ship from Malaysia to Kochi.

30 Indian Navy cadets visited the Chinese ship berthed at the Cochin Port Trust. Earlier in the day, the Chinese navy personnel aboard Zhen He attended a briefing on the various training activities of the Southern Naval Command. The Command also threw a reception to the visiting foreign Navy personnel at INS Dronacharya base in the evening.

In Kochi, the itinerary of the visiting ship includes mutual visits, a game of football, and a joint band performance at the Sagarika auditorium. The cadets on board the ship are also expected to visit the Indian Naval Maritime Museum at INS Dronacharya and the Navigation and Direction School at the Naval Base. They will also go on board INS Sudarshini, Indian Navy's recently-commissioned sail training vessel.

Source: [The Hindu](#), 10 May

## TALWAR CLASS FRIGATE FOR INDIAN NAVY LEAVES FOR SEA TRIALS FROM KALINGRAD

INS Tarkash, a Teg class frigate being built for the Indian Navy at the Yantar Shipyard in Russia, left for sea trials. The frigate, the second in a series of three frigates built under a \$ 1.6-billion contract with India, left from the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad. The first frigate, INS Teg, was delivered to India in April 2012, while the third, INS Trikand, is still under construction.

The new frigates are armed with eight BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles. They are also equipped with a 100-mm gun, a Kshtil Surface-to-Air Missile system, two Kashtan air-defence gun/missile systems, two twin 533-mm torpedo launchers and an Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) helicopter.

Russia has previously built three Talwar class frigates for India: the INS Talwar, INS Trishul and INS Tabar.

Source: [Economic Times](#), 24 May



## INDIA A NATURAL LEADER OF INDIAN OCEAN REGION: ANTONY

India has positioned herself as a natural leader of the Indian Ocean region in view of her strategic location and operational capability, even as her Navy was asked to be prepared to meet eventualities in view of the complex emerging security matrix in the region.

"India's strategic location in the Indian Ocean and the professional capability of our navy bestows upon us a natural ability to play a leading role in ensuring peace and stability in the Indian Ocean region," Defence Minister AK Antony told the conference of Indian Navy commanders. "We have a well-established material and training assistance programme with Indian Ocean Region countries for their capacity-building and enhancement," he noted.

Indian Navy Chief, Admiral Nirmal Verma, and other top naval commanders were present at the conference. Describing the emerging security matrix in the Indian Ocean region as "really complex", with "some political developments" and "worrisome factors", Shri AK Antony also asked the Navy top brass to maintain high levels of preparedness at all times.

Stressing the importance of security of maritime activity through the sea-lanes in the Indian Ocean for economic prosperity of India and that of the world, the defence minister said that free movement of trade and energy supplies and various activities like fishing and extraction of mineral resources were equally crucial for economic security. On the navy's modernization programme, he said that the induction of the nuclear powered submarine, INS Chakra, last month had ushered in a new era of submarine operations for India.

Commending the Navy's commitment to indigenisation, Antony said, "This is amply borne by the fact that 44 out of 48 ships and submarines, presently on order, are being constructed in India." The public sector shipyards, he said, must speed up construction of warships and submarines and further modernise the infrastructure and technology of ship-production. Stressing on self-reliance in critical technologies, Shri AK Antony said that the Navy and the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) needed to put in more efforts to meet time lines.

Source: [Deccan Chronicle](#), 8 May

### INDIAN NAVY IN 'FAST FORWARD' MODE

The Indian Navy will acquire at least five ships every year for the next 10 years and will deploy two nuclear submarines and its new aircraft carrier, INS Vikramaditya, in 2013. The fast forward mode after a long lull has been mentioned both by Defence Minister A K Antony as well as Naval Chief Admiral Nirmal Verma on different occasions, particularly at the induction of the nuclear-powered submarine, INS Chakra, on April 4.

Since then, the Navy has inducted the first of its newly designed Teg Class Guided Missile ships, INS Teg, from Russia (April 27) and plans are being firmed up for building four amphibious transport dock ships like the INS Jalashwa, as well as six new conventional submarines with Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) and cruise missile capability. Two Deepak class fleet tankers

have already been acquired from Italy to give the Indian Navy what Admiral Verma described as "Long Legs". The Navy has been very happy with INS Jalashwa, the refitted ex-USS Trenton (LPD 14) which it got cheap from the US Navy, due to the vessel's added potential for providing humanitarian and disaster relief. It is the second largest ship after INS Viraat, the Navy's lone aircraft carrier at present, and has comfortable crew quarters and efficient lifts.

The Navy has already inducted two of the three Shivalik-class frigates in 2010 and 2011, respectively (INS Shivalik and INS Satpura), while the third in the series, INS Sahyadri, is due this year. Overall, the Navy has planned to acquire some 500 aircraft, about 100 of them combat jets, and the remaining for transport and surveillance roles. Helicopters also form a major chunk of the proposed acquisitions.

Additionally, India is working on two more aircraft carriers, possibly of over 60,000 tonnes, and it will take some time to select the combat jet combination for them. Those two carriers could use slingshot propulsion by steam turbines rather than ski jumps, and of course, the standard three arrestor wires. That technology will possibly have to come from the US carriers, where slingshot takeoffs are routine. Naval teams are already in touch with manufacturers as part of the learning process, after which appropriate RFPs would be issued.

The French company, DCNS, is already involved in making six Scorpene submarines at the Mazagon Dock in Mumbai, with a proposal to upgrade the last two of them with AIP capability to extend the underwater capability of the submarine from about three days to seven. As for the nuclear submarines, which can stay underwater for three months, the Indian Navy is working on two or three more Arihant-class submarines. They could progressively be equipped with more powerful nuclear reactors and weapons than INS Arihant, whose systems are now being fine-tuned. INS Arihant is smaller than INS Chakra, but is both nuclear-powered and nuclear weapon capable (designated SSBN) while INS Chakra is nuclear-powered with non-nuclear attack missiles (SSN). Both the nuclear submarines are based at Vishakhapatnam on India's eastern seaboard, where work on the remaining nuclear submarines is already in progress at the Ship Building Centre (SBC).

Source: [Economic Times](#), 16 May

## SEA TRIAL OF INS VIKRAMADITYA AIRCRAFT PUT OFF TILL JUNE

Running months behind delivery schedule, sea trials of the INS Vikramaditya aircraft carrier have been put off by Russian authorities, which may trigger further slippages in its handing over to the Indian Navy. The carrier is currently being overhauled at the Sevmash shipyard, Severodvinsk in northern Russia. "The start of the sea trials has been moved to the beginning of June from May 25," Ria Novosti reported quoting a shipyard spokesman. The vessel was originally scheduled to sail for trials in the White Sea and the Barents Sea on May 25. The officials said that the trial may have been put off due to poor weather forecast.

India and Russia signed a multi-billion dollar deal in 2005 for the purchase of the Soviet-built Admiral Gorshkov carrier, but delivery has already been delayed twice, pushing up the cost of refurbishing the carrier from \$ 947 million to \$ 2.3 billion. The delivery of the Admiral Gorshkov to the Indian Navy is expected in December 2012.

Source: [Economic Times](#), 24 May

## NAVY NOW HAS INDIGENOUS 'KAVACH' PROTECTION

The first lot of chaff rocket 'Kavach', a naval decoy system meant for countering missiles and other incoming guided threats to Indian naval ships, and the high explosive version of anti-submarine rocket system were formally handed over to the Navy by the Ammunition Factory, Khadki (AFK) on 24 May.

Modern armed forces use chaff to distract radar-guided missiles from their targets. Most warships have chaff dispensing systems for self-defence. The AFK has developed three versions of naval decoy system 'Kavach' with ranges of 12 km (long range); 5 km (medium range) and 1 km (short range) chaff rockets. Usually, these rockets are fired to act as decoys against incoming guided threats to naval ships. All the three versions are launched in different situations based on incoming threats.

The 'Kavach' decoy system releases chaff made of silver coated glass fibre which forms a clutter that remains suspended so that the incoming guided threat confuses the chaff with the actual target and could lock on to the chaff cloud instead of the actual target.

Source: [Times of India](#), 25 May



### **PIPAVAV, MAZAGAON DOCK TO SET UP JV TO BUILD WARSHIPS FOR NAVY**

Nikhil Gandhi-promoted Pipavav Defence and Offshore Engineering has been selected by Mazagaon Dock as a preferred partner for a joint venture that will look to build warships and submarines for the Indian Navy. Mazagaon Dock is India's biggest defence shipyard and accounts for more than 85% of the defence vessels built in the country.

The joint venture, which was earlier announced in September 2011, was put on hold by the Ministry of Defence due to allegations from Pipavav's rivals over the selection policy.

In September last year, immediately after the announcement of the deal, Pipavav's rivals, including the country's largest infrastructure company, L&T, and India's largest private shipyard, ABG Shipyard, had complained to the Ministry about discrepancies in the selection process followed by Mazagaon. They had complained separately to the ministry that the state-owned shipyard had set no deadlines for submitting the proposals and did not disclose the evaluation criteria. Following the allegations, the Ministry deferred the deal until a new policy on joint ventures was put in place and said it would study the complaints received from private shipyards.

In February, the Defence Ministry issued new policy guidelines for establishing joint venture companies by defence undertakings. The new provisions included the retention of affirmative right of a state-owned defence firm for prior approval of key decisions of the JV company such as amendments to memorandum of association or articles of association or restructuring of the JV by issue or buy-back of shares. The 50:50 Joint Venture named Mazagaon Dock Pipavav will implement part of the existing orders of Mazagaon Dock of Rs 1,00,000 crore (\$21.69 billion) and also bid for future defence contracts in India.

In 2011, the government had agreed to allow public private partnerships in the defence sector and Mazagaon Dock was the first to get off the block while the other three - Cochin Shipyard, Hindustan Shipyard and Garden Reach Shipbuilders - were expected to follow suit.

Source: [Economic Times](#), 4 May

### INS VINDHYAGIRI TO BE USED AS TARGET

The Bombay High Court allowed the destruction of *INS Vindhyagiri*, after the Navy said the warship might explode due the presence of ammunition which could not be removed from the vessel. The ship has been grounded since it collided with a merchant vessel, *MV Nordlake* in January 2011. The Navy application said if the ship exploded at the place where it was berthed, it might cause huge damage to naval assets and merchant vessels passing nearby.

Decision to dispose of the ship was taken mutually, and the Navy submitted the minutes of meetings between both parties to the court. Twelve chambers of the warship were full of ammunition. Of these, the Navy could empty 11 chambers. One chamber filled with explosives remained submerged in water for long, thus prompting a survey by the experts, who opined that touching the explosives might lead to an explosion.

Though *MV Nordlake* initially opposed the Navy application, filed two months ago in the court, which is hearing disputes over damages, both parties arrived at a consensus subsequently. Official sources told *The Hindu* that at least four joint surveys had been conducted previously by the Navy and *MV Nordlake*.

“We will now take her into the deep sea and destroy her by using her for target practice,” an official said. The process is expected to take three weeks.

Source: [The Hindu](#), 9 May



### SUPREME COURT REFUSES ENTRY TO TOXIC SHIP EXXON VALDEZ

The Supreme Court has banned MV Exxon Valdez from entering India, saying the ship, involved in one of the worst US oil spills, will not be allowed in for dismantling until it has been decontaminated. The ship, now known as the "Oriental Nicety," entered Indian waters and was headed for Gujarat when the Supreme Court gave its order. The ship was bought recently by the Hong Kong-based subsidiary of an Indian ship breaking firm and was being taken to the coastal town of Alang, the hub of India's ship breaking industry, for dismantling. After the court's order, Gujarat maritime authorities and the state's pollution control authorities withdrew the permission they had granted to the company to anchor the ship near Alang beach.

Gopal Krishna, an environmental activist, had filed an application asking the Supreme Court to give directions to the Indian government and the shipping ministry on the purchase of the ship and its entry into Indian waters. The court then issued notices to the government and the ministry asking for information on the intended steps regarding the ship.

On March 24, 1989, millions of gallons of crude oil had spewed into Alaska's ecologically sensitive Prince William Sound when the Exxon Valdez dashed against rocks, coating the shoreline with petroleum sludge and killing nearly 40,000 birds. The spill caused incalculable environmental damage and demolished the area's fishing industry. Texas-based Exxon Mobil Corp spent \$900 million in restitution in a 1991 settlement and is battling more litigation from the spill. The tanker moved on, with five name changes since the spill and repeated ownership changing, apparently to keep the ship in use while distancing it from the disaster. The ship is 26 years old, not significantly aged for tankers, but it was considerably damaged in its lifetime. It was split open by rocks in the Alaska spill and was damaged in a collision in the South China Sea in 2010.

The Indian court cited the Basel Convention, an international treaty that calls for decontamination in a ship's country of export. Mercury, arsenic, asbestos and residual oil can contaminate ship hulls and holds. India has one of the world's largest industries for breaking down old ships and oil tankers

centred around Alang, and workers in the coastal town are expected to process the ship to salvage scraps of metal and parts that retain value. However, environment activists say that ship breaking companies do not follow any precautions while breaking and handling end-of-life ships, exposing workers and the environment to toxic materials.

Source: [IBN Live](#), 9 May

### REMEMBERING BIO-DIVERSITY

In 2012, the UN decided to celebrate 'The International Day for Biological Diversity' with the theme 'Marine Bio-diversity'. This theme has been selected as an opportunity to provide information about marine life and to raise awareness on the issue and increase practical action.

#### Marine life

From 2000 to 2010, a worldwide collaboration by scientists around the world set out to try and determine how much life is in the sea. Titled 'Census of Marine Life,' the effort involved 2,700 scientists from over 80 nations, who participated in 540 expeditions around the world. At the end of the census, scientists estimated that the total number of marine species could be at least a million. Some think the figure could be twice as high.

#### Why should we bother?

India has a role to play in saving marine biodiversity as a major part of the country is surrounded with salt water. Just like many other parts of the world, marine life is in danger here because of many reasons. Marine biodiversity is in trouble mainly because of pollution. According to a study, 80 per cent of the marine pollution comes from land based activities.

#### Oil and fertiliser

Oil spills cause huge damage to the marine environment. According to a study, 36 per cent of oil contents go down the drains and rivers as waste from cities and industrial areas. Fertilisers run off from farms is another problem in coastal areas. The extra nutrients cause eutrophication- flourishing of algal blooms that deplete the water's dissolved oxygen and suffocate other marine

life.

### Garbage, sewage disposal

Solid garbage also makes its way to the ocean. Plastic bags, balloons, glass bottles, shoes, packaging materials are reaching the sea in huge quantities everyday. Plastic materials block the breathing passages and stomachs of many marine species including whales, seals, puffins and turtles.

Many parts of the world sewage flows untreated or under- treated, into the ocean. This sewage can also lead to eutrophication. Disposal of chemicals and consumer products can also harm the marine species.

### What can we do?

Though dumping of most toxic materials into the sea was banned by the London Dumping Convention in 1972, the decision has not been implemented in India strictly even to this day. According to Yathish Baikampady, a social activist from Mangalore, “Industrialisation is unstoppable as it brings more revenue. People are getting jobs, so nobody wants to lose this for the sake of marine diversity.” On protecting marine species, he said that artificial reefs would help save endangered sea species, especially fishes. It can give shelter to fish and fishing should be prohibited in such areas.

“High mechanization also brings problems to the marine diversity. Trawling should be decreased as much as possible. The government, industrialists and fishermen should think about saving marine asset along with the industry,” he added. Fisherman Lathish agrees that the amount of fish they get is less these days. “Fishing through mechanical boats has brought some changes these days,” he said.

Speaking to City Herald, Fisheries Department Assistant Director P Parshwanath said that the government had taken steps to increase the production of fish and help fishermen. “For the conservation of fishes as well as the industry, we ban fishing during rainy season (June 15 to August 10). Prawns fingerlings are released to sea every year,” he said.

“High mechanisation definitely affects fishery. Hence, the government has banned boats with more than 10 HP power in the ban period. Unfortunately, it

is difficult to stop the growth of industries, so it is very difficult to manage both. Higher authorities have to do something,” he opines. It is time to think about marine assets and to take some workable action to save the beautiful world below the water.

Source: [Deccan Herald](#), 31 May