

Address of Ambassador Guðni Bragason at a working dinner in Bangaluru at the invitation of Reply Seafood ehf and Marel India Pvt Ltd on 23 November 2021.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a pleasure to be here in Bangaluru, city that I have heard so much about, always in glowing terms as a vibrant technology centre with great many activities and a great future.

I like to thank Siddarth Swaminathan of Reply Seafood and Jose Martin Xaviers of Marel India for the invitation and the opportunity to address this gathering. It was a pleasure to visit Marel today and we look forward to visiting Reply tomorrow.

Fisheries is an important theme in our visit, but we will also have an opportunity to touch upon other important sectors, such as renewable energy, which provide us with opportunities to strengthen the trade between our countries. Our Trade Representative, Rahul Congtham, will make a presentation on this in a while.

I like to mention few issues from the perspective of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

Our countries have a long cooperation on oceans issues within the UN and FAO and other international agencies. We share the same goals on sustainability, clean oceans, blue economy and the fight against plastic pollution in the sea. India ratified the Law of the Sea in 1995 and is an Observer State in the Arctic Council.

Our countries have made an Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Field of Sustainable Fisheries Development. It is a comprehensive text which gives us a solid and formal ground to build on.

We live, however, in a free market economy and trade, also trade in fish, should adhere to the rule of the market. We have built our fishing sector according to market principles, free of subsidies and with a transferable quota system. This has guaranteed sustainability of the fish stocks around Iceland and made fish products the most important export product.

Free trade is essential for the economy of my country. We have conducted talks on a possible free trade agreement between the EFTA countries (Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein) and India for 15 years and hope for progress in these talks. We urge Indian authorities to reconsider the Indian heavy (33%) customs tariff for all types of seafood.

We recognize the need to share know-how and technology in the fishing sector. Therefore our development cooperation has concentrated on training in the fishing sector, from the catch, processing and marketing, involving health and sanitary aspects as well as social aspects such as the role of women in the fishing sector.

Now, several dozens of fishing experts, also from India, have been invited to come to Iceland to train with the the Fisheries Training Programme in Iceland (UNESCO/GRÓ/FTP). The FTP is also interested in holding a capacity building seminar at an Indian Institute/University.

Another aspect of this is more commercial, that is the Icelandic Oceans Cluster which needs a strong partner in India and is interested in sharing know-how on the cluster concept.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Last month I had the opportunity to meet with Mr Parshottam Kodahai Rupala, Union Minister for Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, which gave an opportunity to discuss some of the issues I have already mentioned.

Allow me to conclude by saying that the fishing sector provides us with endless new ideas and innovation, as well as several possibilities for Iceland and India to cooperate on. Mr Chongtham will discuss this further.

Thank you.