

India supports transparent lending practices: Sushma

Swaraj's comments are in reference to Xi's BRI project which raises the risk of debt distress for 68 countries

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 28 AUGUST

While making a veiled criticism of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), India on Tuesday reaffirmed its commitment to responsible and transparent debt financing matched by responsible lending practices in all its engagements with its global partners.

"In all engagements, we are guided by the development and security priorities of our partners. Our approach is based on inter-dependence rather than dominance or narrow reciprocal considerations," external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj said while addressing the 3rd Indian

Ocean Conference in Hanoi.

India, she said, understood that following universally recognised norms, transparency, openness, financial responsibility, and promoting a sense of local ownership were essential for better and more sustainable development outcomes.

Swaraj's comments are seen as an indirect reference to Chinese President Xi Jinping's ambitious BRI project which, New Delhi argues, would raise the risk of debt distress for 68 countries identified as potential borrowers if the initiative follows Chinese practices for infrastructure financing.

The Indian minister also stated that India supported the lawful uses of the seas and



unimpeded lawful maritime commerce and peaceful resolutions of disputes in accordance with universally recognised principles of international laws.

Her comments assume significance against the backdrop of China's aggressiveness posturing against its neighbours on matters pertaining to the SCS. Emphasising that India's vision for the region was one of cooperation and collec-

tive action, Swaraj said, "We cannot tap the bounty of the Indian Ocean without ensuring maritime peace and stability. Economic prosperity and maritime security go hand-in-hand. Security is an all-encompassing concept and includes traditional, non-traditional and newly emerging threats."

These include maritime terrorism, smuggling, transnational crimes, drug-trafficking, illegal immigration, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, piracy, unregulated private maritime security companies and proliferation of sensitive items. "It is further compounded by natural disasters, oil spills and effects of climate change, to which our region is highly

prone," she added.

Swaraj said it was self-evident, therefore, that those who live in this region bear the primary responsibility for peace, stability and prosperity in the Indian Ocean. It was equally valid that it was only through collective action that the region could meet these challenges.

India, she said, was today devoting more resources and assigning greater priority to building connectivity, contacts and cooperation in its immediate neighbourhood.

This was manifest in projects in sectors ranging from rail and road transport to power generation and transmission, from port and waterways transport to educational and health exchanges.