



**Opening remarks for
Prof. Celeste Saulo
Secretary-General
World Meteorological Organization**

**On the occasion of IMD's 150th Anniversary
15 January 2025**

Good morning,

Shri Narendra Modi, Honourable Prime Minister of India,
Shri Jagdeep Dhankar Ji, Honourable Vice President of India,
Shri Rijiku Ji, Honourable Union Cabinet Minister at the Ministry of Earth Sciences,
Dr Jitendra Singh, Honourable Minister of State & Minister of Earth Sciences,
Dr M Ravichandran, Secretary at the Ministry of Earth Sciences,
Dr Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, Director General of Meteorology at the India Meteorological
Department (IMD),

Distinguished guests, esteemed colleagues, and friends.

On behalf of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), it is my honour to extend my warmest greetings and heartfelt congratulations to IMD on this extraordinary milestone – the celebration of its 150th anniversary.

[Congratulations for 150 years]

Established in 1875, IMD stands as a testament to India's pioneering spirit in meteorological science. For 150 years, it has served as a cornerstone of weather observation, forecasting, and research across the Indian subcontinent.

This legacy of dedication and innovation has enhanced India's resilience and contributed greatly to the global good.

IMD plays a fundamental role in disaster risk reduction by protecting communities from extreme weather events. Its expertise also supports key sectors such as agriculture, water resource management, energy, tourism, aviation, and public health. The commitment to public service resonates deeply with WMO's core mission of ensuring a safer and more resilient world for all.

The socio-economic benefits are huge. And my message today is that investment in National Meteorological and Hydrological Services is a win-win for everyone.

The 150th anniversary milestone also reflects the unwavering dedication and brilliance of generations of scientists, researchers, and staff who have served IMD with passion and purpose. Their tireless efforts have not only strengthened India's meteorological capabilities but have also enriched the global scientific community.

At this juncture I would like to say a special word about the essential role of an Indian female scientist who was a pioneer. Anna Mani, born in 1918, advanced to becoming Deputy Director-General of IMD. She excelled in a male-dominated profession and was a role model for female meteorologists all over the world.

In 2025, WMO celebrates its 75th anniversary as a specialized United Nations (UN) agency. When I look at WMO photos in 1950 compared to today, I realize how far we have travelled towards gender parity. But, also, how far we still have to go!

As a founding Member of WMO since 1950, India has been an invaluable partner in WMO's programmes. An Indian representative has been on WMO's Executive Board for more than 60 years – longer than any other country in the Asia-Pacific region. Dr Mrutyunjay Mohapatra currently serves as the Third Vice-President of WMO and provides invaluable leadership. Thank you!

India plays a vital role in regional meteorological cooperation.

Last month, IMD for the first time hosted the Asia Oceania Meteorological Satellite Users' Conference here in New Delhi. I am proud that it was a huge success. It brought together operators and users of meteorological satellite products for a dialogue which is of great potential benefit to climate-sensitive sectors and vulnerable communities.

IMD hosts several WMO-designated regional centres, including the Regional Specialized Meteorological Centre (RSMC) New Delhi Tropical Cyclone Centre. Accurate forecasts and warnings and coordinated disaster management have saved countless lives not just in India, but in the entire region. Tropical cyclones used to claim tens of thousands of lives. Thankfully, this is now a nightmare of the past. This is exemplified by Tropical Cyclone Mocha in May 2023. Advance forecasts by RSMC New Delhi triggered major humanitarian preparedness and response activities BEFORE Mocha made landfall in Myanmar and Bangladesh, and loss of life was kept to a minimum.

In this regard, congratulations again to IMD to have been elected in 2024 as host of the WMO-ESCAP Panel on Tropical Cyclones Secretariat! I am grateful for IMD to be coordinating this vital work for the countries bordering the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea.

IMD also plays an exceptional role for the Severe Weather Forecasting Programme (SWFP) South Asia: as a contributing global Numerical Weather Prediction (NWP) centre, and as a lead regional centre for severe weather forecasting supporting nine countries in the sub-region. It is supported by the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF) and the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS).

We have also learned many lessons since the Indian Ocean Tsunami 20 years ago, which caused such a devastating toll, including in India. IMD provides seismic data to the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System (IOTWS) to prevent a repeat of such a tragedy.

WMO is also immensely grateful for IMD's support for the South Asian Climate Outlook Forum (SASCOF) and its seasonal predictions of the all-important Southwest Monsoon. The seasonal outlooks are invaluable for the regional economy and are an example of how we can leverage science to serve society. We commend your interest in strengthening forecasting and monitoring also in the Third Pole region, including through the new Third Pole Climate Forum (TCPF).

Flash floods are major hazards, as we all know. Since 2018, India has served as the Flash Flood Guidance System (FFGS) South Asia Regional Centre. It provides flash flood guidance and forecasts to India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, supporting nearly 1.6 billion people. WMO has been delighted to train more than 90 IMD staff in operating, sustaining, and supporting flash flood forecasting and warning operations, including training the trainers. We are gratified that, in return, IMD has supported other countries with training and tools for timely warnings.

IMD's commitment to climate monitoring and early warning systems aligns perfectly with the international Early Warnings for All initiative to ensure that everyone on Earth is protected by life-saving early warning systems by 2027. We commend you for translating complex climate data into actionable information via tools like the newly launched Decision Support System and the Mausam Unified Mobile App. Early warnings work. They must work for everyone and reach everyone.

IMD and Indian experts share this expertise through their active participation in the working group and expert teams of our technical commissions and regional associations, and as such make invaluable contributions to our WMO community.

This celebration comes at a crucial moment for the planet.

Like many other countries, India had its hottest year on record in 2024. The country suffered prolonged extreme heat, which greatly impacted human health, agriculture, water management and energy supplies. Heavy monsoon rains caused disruption and death, as we saw with the tragic landslides in Kerala in July. More recently, air pollution hit alarming and dangerous levels in many parts of the country.

At global level, it was the warmest year on record, at about 1.55 °C above the pre-industrial era. WMO announced last week that it is likely that 2024 is the first calendar year to temporarily breach 1.5 °C.

Crossing 1.5°C in an individual year does not mean that the Paris Agreement is dead. But, as we all know, it is in very grave danger.

As WMO Secretary-General I repeatedly say that the climate crisis is closely interlinked with the inequality crisis. We must make 2025 a year of decisive climate action to reduce greenhouse gases and speed up the transition to renewable energy. Climate change mitigation must be informed by the best possible science.

National Meteorological and Hydrological Services all have a vital role in providing tailored weather and climate services to power the shift to renewables and to support adaptation.

In the long-term, the cost of climate inaction will be much higher than climate action. We have a responsibility to future generations and to the planet.

To conclude, as we celebrate IMD's 150th anniversary, we are aware of the challenges and opportunities ahead. We are proud to have worked alongside IMD. We look forward to continuing our journey together to build a sustainable and resilient future for all.

Congratulations once again on this momentous occasion.

Thank you.