

**Visit of INS Tabar
Deck Reception**

30 July 2021
Stockholm

**Remarks
Ambassador Tanmaya Lal**

Deputy Chief of Joint Operations, Maj Gen Jonas Wikman
Commander of INS Tabar, Captain Mahesh and his colleagues
Distinguished Guests
Ladies & Gentlemen

Good evening and a very warm welcome to all of you on board INS Tabar in Stockholm on a July Friday evening !

It is exciting to receive an Indian Navy Ship on a goodwill visit in Sweden, more so since it comes after a long time of constraints on physical travel.

The 300 officers and men on board this ship have sailed more than 15,000 km crossing various seas and oceans to be here with us.

It is a privilege to welcome them in Sweden.

India and Sweden have long maritime trading traditions going back millennia.

Earlier this week, an ancient Indian city in Gujarat called Dholavira was inscribed on the List of World Heritage Sites by UNESCO. Dholavira was a port town 5,000 years ago on the west coast of India, trading with distant lands via the maritime route.

Here in Sweden, we recently visited the islands of Helgö and Birka, not far from Stockholm. Both were flourishing trading ports around 1,500 years ago. Among the objects found there are a small bronze statuette of Buddha and beads and crystals that came from India, revealing the long distance trading routes and networks of that time !

Indians have traded to our east and west, with Africa and Southeast Asia and beyond, across the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal. There has been considerable cultural exchange and a large Indian Diaspora in that region that travelled on the ocean waves.

Closer to present times, the Swedish East India Company explored trading opportunities with India and beyond in 18th century launching various sailing ships. I understand that now there are plans for a Swedish sailing ship Götheborg to head towards India and East Asia in a year's time to commemorate the earlier voyages.

Today, India with its coastline of more than 7,500 km and more than 1,000 islands, has an Exclusive Economic Zone that is spread across nearly 2.3 million sq km. We share maritime boundaries with 7 nations in our neighbourhood.

There are 12 major ports and over 200 smaller ports, and nearly 30 shipyards on the Indian coast continuing the longstanding shipbuilding tradition.

A large section of our population resides close to the coasts, and millions of Indians derive their livelihood from the ocean economy.

The professional reputation and capabilities of the Indian navy are well known. I understand that the Indian Navy has around 160 ships of various sizes and capabilities and more than 200 aircraft. The Indian Coast Guard has around 170 vessels and around 50 aircraft. These numbers reflect the scale of maritime safety and security challenges for India.

In addition to its role as a security provider to our nation, the Indian Navy is also always active in the Indo-Pacific region assisting with security and HADR operations.

The Indian navy is among the first responders in any crisis situation in our region.

It engages with our partners helping build their capacities;
participates in joint patrolling for their EEZ surveillance;
supplements humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts;
conducts Search and Rescue and Evacuation operations in various emergencies including oil spills and fires;
assists anti-drug trafficking and anti-piracy operations where we have worked with our European partners;
and also conducts hydrography surveys to facilitate navigation safety.

In fact, right now, an Indian Navy ship INS Talwar is participating in the Cutlass Express Exercise, alongwith partner navies off Kenya on the coast of East Africa (*where both Captain Mahesh and I have served at different times*). The exercise is aimed to help improve combined maritime law enforcement capacity and promote regional security.

The twin inter-linked concepts of security and prosperity provides the basis for India's vision for the Indian Ocean region – Security and Growth for All in the Region SAGAR. India is a founding member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association IORA and is an Observer at the Indian Ocean Commission IOC, both headquartered in Mauritius, my previous station of posting.

Defence cooperation is an important aspect of India Sweden partnership, which continues to intensify.

Around four months back our Prime Ministers held a Virtual Summit. The leaders also interacted during the India EU Summit around two months later. Last month our Defence Ministers addressed an important event organised by the Defence industry players of India and Sweden to explore further opportunities of joint collaborations, manufacturing, R&D and investment.

The previous visit by an Indian Navy ship was that of INS Tarkash that travelled to Karlskrona two years ago. There are regular visits at Ministerial and Chiefs of Forces level. Earlier this year, the Chief of Air Staff of Sweden participated in the Aero India Show, which was organised in a virtual format.

It is heartening to see that, despite Covid, our high-level exchanges have continued to intensify.

We look forward to a continued deepening of our multifaceted ties.

In conclusion, may I say that it is especially significant to receive this goodwill visit by an Indian Navy ship here in Sweden at this time, as our partnership continues to grow and also as we embark on the celebrations of 75 years of our independence.

May I thank all of you again for joining us this evening on board INS Tabar.

Thank you