

PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

PRESENTATION OF COLOURS TO THE WESTERN FLEET
OF THE INDIAN NAVY

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

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Following is the text of the speech of the President, Dr. Shanker Dayal Sharma at the presentation of colours to the Western Fleet of the Indian Navy in Mumbai today:

It gives me immense pleasure to be on board the INS Viraat for the Presentation of Colours to the Western Fleet.

The Western Fleet is a premier fleet of the Indian Navy, with a tradition of valour and courage in the service of our Motherland, during war and peace. It covered itself with glory during the 1971 operations in the Arabian Sea. Professionalism, determination, devotion to duty and the pursuit of excellence have been the hallmarks of this fighting force. On this occasion I felicitate all serving and retired personnel of the Western Fleet and of the Indian Navy for their contributions in making our nation vibrant, strong and united.

As an ancient sea-faring nation with a vast coastline, India has a long experience of naval power and prowess. The Rg Veda, the oldest extant scripture, refers to boats with a hundred oars - शतारित्रां नावमातस्थिवांसम् Our ships have facilitated a flourishing trade of products and commodities and a dynamic exchange of ideas, cultures and philosophies which have expanded the horizons of human thought and have contributed to the greater good of all humankind. They have been carriers of India's message of Peace and Goodwill.

During the period of Chatrapati Shivaji the Great, a very carefully thought out effort was made to build a navy with a clearly defined sphere of action in this region. The name of Kanhoji Angre is famous in our history for his leadership, patriotism and the successes he registered in numerous naval engagements.

In the five decades of Freedom, the Indian Navy has developed into a multi-dimensional service with separate air and submarine arms. It has expanded and increased in size, structure and composition. Progressively, our force is being indigenised. Today we can be proud of our professional naval force and of its magnificent contribution to national security.

And yet, there can be no room for complacency. We cannot rest on our laurels. It is essential, particularly at this moment in our history when we celebrate the Golden Jubilee of our Independence, to make an objective assessment of the manner and the magnitude in which our naval forces should grow. What are the lessons we can derive from our experience after Independence? What are the challenges our nation would face in the next century?

It is seen that the Navy will assume a more enhanced role in the defence of national interests, in the years ahead. Major regional and global developments will have a bearing on the new and diverse responsibilities which the navy will be called upon to shoulder. The world has witnessed growing trends towards integration, both at the regional and international levels. In our own region, SAARC has recently made operational its preferential trading arrangements and the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation has been established.

As our economy matures and moves on to a higher growth path, and as it becomes more open and participates more fully and on an equal footing in the world economy, foreign trade and investment will assume a more significant dimension in our economic processes. Of primary importance would be the goal of ensuring security and safety of our trade and mercantile interests and keeping open the sea-lanes, particularly, for vital inputs such as energy supplies for our economy.

It has been said that the twenty first century will be the century of the Oceans - the last great frontier with vast untapped potential of fisheries, minerals and plant resources. Already, several nations and multinational consortia have secured allocation of mine sites in the deep sea bed. India is among these pioneer investors who have retrieved manganese nodules from the ocean floor. Similarly, we are active participants in the exploration of, and scientific research and development in, Antarctica.

To meet the numerous and diverse requirements of the future, it is essential to develop a multi-dimensional and balanced navy with adequate capabilities in the submarine, surface and air operations. In an area marked

by rapid technological advances, where equipment is faced with quick obsolescence, it is necessary to strengthen efforts for modernizing our navy to ensure that it becomes a world class navy. A multi-pronged strategy involving cooperation with other countries as well as stepping up indigenous R&D efforts and enhancing ship building capacity and capabilities should be pursued vigorously.

I am reminded of what Smt. Indira Gandhi had said while commissioning the first India-built frigate, INS Nilgiri on 3rd June, 1972 :
[I quote]

“We speak of three forces. But Defence Production is the fourth force. And unless the fourth force is strong, the other three cannot give of their best and a country cannot be truly strong.” [Unquote]

As I indicated in my Address at the opening of Parliament earlier this year, the Government is committed to the modernization of the navy on an urgent basis and several steps to upgrade and equip the navy are being undertaken.

It is the personnel of any institution which determines the quality and contribution of that institution in the attainment of national goals and protection of national interests. The navy is no exception. Our officers and sailors are known for their high degree of competence, professionalism and devotion to duty. We have a young and highly qualified navy. Through constant training on modern and up-to-date equipment the professional capabilities of our sailors should be enhanced and upgraded on a continuing basis.

Our sailors meet the rigours of a hard and difficult life at sea, cheerfully and without complaint. As I look around, I see bright, enthusiastic and confident faces. I see the face of young India, the India of the twenty first century. The navy is truly a national institution, representing the glorious diversity and the essential oneness of India.

As in the past, our navy will be a factor for peace and stability in our region and, indeed, the world. We build our strength in the cause of maintaining and safeguarding Peace. The Indian ethos is one of peace and

non-violence. Our deep and abiding conviction is that durable prosperity and progress is feasible only in an atmosphere of peace. India is prepared to explore ways and means of forging and sustaining the peace in our neighbourhood.

We have always come to the assistance of friendly countries. The Western Fleet rendered timely help in the Maldives and Sri Lanka in their hour of need. It has participated in a commendable manner in the UN Peace Keeping Operation in Somalia. Acting as Ambassadors of goodwill on visits to ports in the Indian Ocean littoral, the Western Fleet has earned universal admiration and respect.

The Colours that have been presented to the Western Fleet today, symbolize the honour, the courage and sense of commitment of the Indian Navy. When the President's Colours were presented to the Indian Navy for the first time, by Dr. Rajendra Prasad on 27th May, 1951, he had said :
[I quote]

“It is of the utmost importance that (the navy) should stand steadfastly as the ever vigilant sentinels of peace and freedom of this ancient land.” [Unquote]

I would like to reiterate that exhortation to you today.

The nation is proud of the Indian Navy and stands behind its valiant sailors in their sacred task of protecting and defending our Motherland. I wish the Indian Navy success and glory. May you go from strength to strength as a force for Peace, National Security and advancement.

GPT/SK/GKK

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