

Remarks by High Commissioner Ruchira Kamboj at the inauguration of the exhibition “*Women Changing India*” on 31 October 2017

This is a unique event. One that I could not resist. And also one, where I will tell a story about 6 young women changing India circumnavigating the globe, creating history, and in a sector where traditionally only men have dared!

My thanks to Jacques Michel & Vikas Khandelwal; my greetings to Ambassador Farnaud, Urvashi Bhatula, Salma Rokkiah and to this wonderful audience.

On 10 September 2017, 6 young women drawn from different parts of India and bonded to a common dream, were flagged off by India's Defence Minister, also a woman, from Goa, on board a sailing vessel the *INSV Tarini*. Their Mission : to circumnavigate the globe in approximately 165 days.

Exemplifying the grit and determination of the modern Indian women.

Reminding us that gender does not define potential.

Underscoring that nothing is impossible for a woman.

The skipper Lieutenant Commander Vartika Joshi hails from Rishikesh in Uttarakhand. Rishikesh, is a small town near Haridwar, on the banks of the River Ganges nestled between hills and is often called the gateway to the Himalayas. The town known for white water river rafting, yoga and meditation, has produced the skipper of the 17 metre boat, attempting this historic feat.

The baby of the team, Lieutenant Commander P. Swati has her own tale to tell. Hailing from a very modest and humble background in Andhra Pradesh, she fought adversity at every stage, never pausing a moment to stop or reflect about her gender or family background . She completed her graduation, joined the Navy as an officer and is now an inspiration to all !

Another crew member Lieutenant Vijaya Devi hails from a small town called Moirang Kwakta Santhong in Bishnupur District, Manipur in the North East of India. If you take the map of Manipur, Bishnupur District falls right in its centre. Vijaya Devi's town falls right in the centre of Bishnupur. The women of Manipur are known to be strong and hardworking . taking

lead in local entrepreneurship, excelling in male dominated sports like boxing and weight lifting and generally being the fulcrum around which families are built. To me, therefore, it is quite fitting that we have a Manipuri girl in Tarini !

Tarini's crew also includes Lieutenant Commander Pratibha Jamwal from Kullu, Himachal Pradesh, Lieutenant Aishwarya Boddapati from Hyderabad, Telengana and Lieutenant Payal Gupta from Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

Six Young ladies seeking to break the unbreakable and touch the untouchable.

To all the sceptics in this room, if there are any, let it be known that :

For a sail boat's voyage to qualify as Circumnavigation, the voyage has to start and finish at the same port; cover a distance of atleast 21600 nm; keep south of the three Great Capes of the Southern Hemisphere; cross all longitudes in the same direction; cross the equator twice; not use any canals and certainly not use the engine for propulsion. These are the exacting standards under which the crew of INSV Tarini is currently sailing to be the first Indian women to have completed circumnavigation.

Where is Tarini now and where will she go next? Tarini has completed the first stage of the voyage and has touched Fremantle, Australia on 23 October. She will start her next leg on 5 November to Lyttelton, New Zealand. We expect to see her in February 2018 at Cape Town. It is, of course, a matter of immense pride that the boat was made in India. But guess what? The mast was built by Southern Spars Cape Town. So, and most fittingly and in the best traditions of India-South Africa friendship, we are bonded with South Africa in this historic voyage.

One last word to all the ladies in this room. There is much yet to be done, but we are proud how far we have travelled together, and I am confident that Tarini will inspire more leaders, more girls and women, to continue this beautiful journey.

Congratulations once again.

Thank You.