

Bismillah.

Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Southern Naval Command,
Vice Admiral A.K. Chawla and Madam Chawla,

Commandant of the Indian Naval Academy Vice Admiral M.A.
Hampiholi and Madam Hampiholi,

Flag Officers, Commanding Officers,

Distinguished Guests,

Members and Faculty Staff at the Indian Naval Academy,

Participating Midshipmen and Cadets,

Esteemed Parents and Guardians,

Respected Members of the Press,

Assalaam Alaikum, Suprabhatam, Namaste and a very Good
Morning to you all.

I bring to you warm greetings from President Ibrahim Mohamed
Solih and the people of Maldives.

At the outset, let me say how impressed I am with the perfection
of the drill, the impeccable turnout, and the sharpness and
smartness on display here this morning.

A smart drill is indicative of a well-run ship.

It speaks of minute attention to detail, countless hours of focused
practice and the relentless pursuit of excellence.

I commend each and every one of you for this outstanding parade display. The event this morning marks yet another stage of metamorphosis in the lives of over 200 young women and men passing out today.

My heartiest congratulations to each and every one of you, and to your families and well-wishers.

You stand on this parade ground as women and men of honour – fearless and confident – and with pride in your hearts. I would like to take this opportunity to graciously acknowledge the decision of the parents, for having encouraged and supported you all in choosing the profession of arms and committing to the service of your great nation. I know of no greater pride that a family will feel than to see their beloved son or daughter join the noble ranks standing in defence of one's motherland.

I would like to compliment all the instructors and administrative staff at the Academy for having moulded raw young girls and boys into the fine officers that they will be, as they pass out today, and infusing in them a strong resolve to meet every challenge and win every battle in life, fairly and honorably.

It is my greatest and most humble honor to be here, and to share the joy and happiness of this event with all of you this morning.

I express my sincere thanks and gratitude to the Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Karambir Singh for extending me the invitation to officiate at this passing out parade.

I would also like to thank Admiral Chawla, Madam Chawla, and the Navy Fraternity, for the warm welcome and excellent arrangements in Kochi.

Let me also thank the Commandant Admiral Hampiholi and Madam Hampiholi, and the faculty here, for the gracious hospitality and cordiality extended to me and my delegation.

I think of India as my second home.

I did a large part of my early formative schooling in Bengaluru. At a young and impressionable age, India mesmerized me with its vibrant colors and diverse cultures.

As I grew up and started participating in social and political activism, I developed great appreciation for the ethos of democracy and the hard-won individual rights and liberties which are the bedrock of this great country.

Every time I come back to India, it evokes a very special sentiment, like a warm embrace from a beloved relative.

My presence here, at this wonderful institution and at this memorable passing out parade is testimony to the longstanding and strong sisterly ties between India and the Maldives.

India continues to be a key developmental partner for the Maldives, and even now, there are numerous social, economic, educational and industrial projects underway in Maldives with Indian participation.

India is also undoubtedly our most longstanding and dependable security partner. At times of acute national need, be it the terrorist attack of November 1988, the 2004 Asian tsunami, the water crisis in Male' in 2014, and the COVID-19 pandemic, India has unfailingly responded to alleviate the problem.

My presence here this morning also speaks about the mutual respect and common values of peace, cooperation and amity between our defence and military forces.

The age-old strong relationship between the Coast Guard of the Maldives National Defence Force, and the Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guards is testimony to this fact.

India's assistance for our defence force is especially critical to increase our professionalism, operational capacity and expand our capabilities.

Speaking at the Indian Ocean Region Defence Ministers' conclave held early this year, the Honorable Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh stated that and I quote, **“A safer Maldives means a safer India and vice-versa,”** unquote.

This sentiment captures the essence of the defence cooperation ‘partnership’ between India and the Maldives.

It is a partnership based on equality, mutual trust and benefit and a deep desire to ensure the safety and security of both our nations, and by extension, the greater Indian Ocean Region.

This vital partnership is strengthened, and invigorated with every high-level interaction, every training program and every joint exercise we conduct.

Just a week back, we commemorated the 30th anniversary of Exercise Dosti, the trilateral joint maritime exercise between India, Maldives and Sri Lanka. The exercise serves as a perfect and time-tested example of cooperation between our defence forces, and our common commitment towards peace and stability.

Having said that, my primary role here today is not to speak about India-Maldives defence cooperation. I would be remiss if I did not speak to the graduating midshipmen. Therefore, Commandant, with your leave, I would now like to say a few words to the graduating class.

Let me start again by congratulating you all. You have passed through the crucible of training. I am sure it was rigorous and demanding, all the more so due to the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns.

I also extend heartiest congratulations to **Midshipman Ranjan Kumar Singh**, the winner of the President's Gold Medal, **Cadet Varad Sampat Shinde**, the winner of the CNS Gold Medal, and the **Daredevil Squadron** for winning the Commandant's Banner.

I extend very special congratulations to **Cadet Aavriti Bhatt**, for winning the Zamorin Trophy for the **Most Promising Woman Trainee** and the CNS Gold Medal. I also congratulate all other medal and prize winners.

Today, you are leaving the nurturing environment of this institution and stepping out into the wider world. Here, we are cocooned in the shadow of Mount Dilli and surrounded by the serene Kavvayi backwaters, and beyond, the majestic Indian Ocean. It is an idyllic, tranquil environment. As someone from another generation, I wish I could say to you all that you would be stepping from this veritable cocoon into a safe and stable world.

But, we all know that the current strategic and security environment is extremely volatile and complex. Threats such as cross border terrorism, maritime and land-based militancy, illicit trafficking and nefarious actions by proxies, pose significant risks to our national security and regional stability. Systemic pressures from climate change, mass movement across borders, increased humanitarian crises and the rise of social media all present significant challenges for national governments.

The COVID-19 pandemic we witnessed, and we are living through even now, is just a precursor to the kind of systemic threats and challenges we would be seeing in the future. I do not want to cloud the joy of this festive event by going on too much on our security predicament, but I am sure you all fully understand and appreciate the situation.

I would say to you that you are very lucky to have had the opportunity to train at the Indian Navy's "Cradle of Naval Leadership." By pushing you through your paces, by honing your skills to perfection, and through rigorous academic exposure, this institution has moulded each and every one of you into a very fine "Scholar Warrior."

I am a firm believer in a solid educational foundation, and I find the motto of the Indian Naval Academy "**Vidyaya-Amritam-Asnute**" which calls on you to "Become Immortal Through Knowledge," to be very fitting. I would urge you all to continue to nurture the habit of a broad academic exploration and build on the foundations you have been provided.

The problems of today and tomorrow need analytical approaches, critical thinking and reasoned deliberations. This institution has also given you all the necessary skill-sets and knowledge to be leaders to sailors under you. I can vouch for the exemplary performance of Maldivian graduates from this proud academy.

MNDF's Northern Area Commander Brigadier General Ismail Shareef is an INA alumnus, as is Colonel Mohamed Saleem, the Commandant of MNDF Coast Guard, just to name a few. This institution has equipped you and prepared you to excel in this profession. Your knowledge, technical skill sets, tactical acumen and leadership is what will ensure the safety and security of **OUR** communities and **OUR** people.

When I say **OURS**, I want to stress on the interconnectedness of national and regional security, and how through your actions and decisions, you will directly influence not only India's security, but the wider region as well.

Every patrol you sail on, every sortie you fly, every incident you attend contributes positively to the security of India, the neighborhood and the wider Indian Ocean. I want you all to remember this at all times. I am especially delighted to note that there are 28 female trainees amongst you.

As a woman and a life-long advocate for greater women's participation in all spheres of life, and more personally, as the mother of a fiercely independent teenage girl, I commend you all for choosing to join this noble profession and to serve your nation.

There is evidence the world over that women's participation in peace building, conflict resolution, and countering violent extremism is a positive force multiplier. Never has the need been greater, or your contribution more valuable.

I would urge you all to keep yourselves physically strong and mentally awake. Make teamwork and collaboration your greatest strength. As you rise in your careers, look to develop networks across services, and with international partners. The burden we have placed on you may be heavy, but you are not alone in this fight. Look and seek partners. Respect diversity of thought, because it signals varied experiences and exposures.

As I went past your formations at review, I saw more than gleaming white uniforms, shiny swords and well-polished boots. I saw fierce determination in your eyes. I saw confidence, poise and vitality in your smart stance. I saw courage, enthusiasm and spirit in your eyes. I also saw devotion to duty, spirit of teamwork and the finest ethos of the naval profession.

My final message to the passing out course is this. Carry the same determination and the same spirit you show today throughout your careers.

Your will to win, your undying perseverance and your relentless pursuit of victory is what this institution has trained and prepared you for. That is what your nation demands of you.

Duty, Honor, Courage. These are the core values of the Indian Navy. As you step across the final step... the Antim Pag, and embark on your professional lives as Naval Officers, make these solemn words the eternal signposts of your careers.

When the horizon seems hazy, there can be no better compass to guide you. When the ground shifts beneath you, there can be no firmer anchor to hold you. And when the swells roil around you, there can be no fairer wind to fill your sails. Duty, Honor, Courage.

Once again, heartiest congratulations to you, your families and loved ones. My felicitations also to the Indian Navy and Coast Guard, and my commendation and sincere admiration for the Commandant and faculty of the Indian Naval Academy.

Graduating midshipmen. Congratulations, God Bless and I wish you all Fair Winds and Following Seas!

Thank you.