

AN INSPIRING JOURNEY

Op-Ed by High Commissioner Ruchira Kamboj in The Cape Times of 16 February 2018

On 10 September 2017, six 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 17 metre sailing vessel, the *INSV Tarini*. Their mission was to circumnavigate the globe touching Australian, New Zealand, the Falklands and South African shores before returning to Goa in approximately 165 days.

Why is this story so riveting? For starters, the feat is ever so rare and difficult – there are more attempts to climb Mount Everest every year than circumnavigation in sail boats!

Then, circumnavigation is not for the feeble minded. It demands an exactitude and forbearance of the highest order. A team must start and finish in the same port, sail a distance of 21, 600 nm, sail 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 or use the engine for propulsion. To get an approximation of that distance, the distance from India to Brazil is about 8000 nautical miles, and this attempt is more than twice that distance!

The crew of *Tarini* was neither born to the sport of ocean sailing, nor are they from particularly privileged backgrounds. Yet they have taken to a sport and an adventure where hitherto mainly men have dared. This is what makes the narrative so compelling. They exemplify grit and determination, remind us that gender does not define potential, and underscore the fact that nothing is impossible for women.

Since casting off from Goa on 10 September 2017, the crew has already spent more than 100 sailing days at sea. They have been through a gamut of emotions. They have witnessed the Southern Lights south of Tasmania during the second leg, on a clear starry night which left them in awe. They have seen a whole family of pilot whales up front next to the boat, which filled them with dread and excitement at the same time. They have mistaken a dead sperm whale in the middle of the ocean that resembled an island from a distance with birds sitting on it. The storms that they have encountered in the Pacific had winds raging upto 130 kmph with monstrous waves of 9 meters in height. They spent 16 sleepless hours to navigate out of that danger.

The *Tarini* girls inspire Indian women, indeed all Womanity! Many doubted that they could undertake the bold voyage with its attendant rigors. Many were skeptical that they would actually complete the journey. That skepticism, even cynicism, is history, as the girls are poised now to complete the fourth and penultimate leg of their journey, due to reach Cape Town, South Africa on 2 March 2018. The circumnavigation will complete as they will touch Goa, India after the South Africa leg. In so doing, they will shatter several records – the first Indian women, indeed Asian

women to accomplish the feat! The Indian Navy will also be the first military to notch up an all-women circumnavigation.

It is a matter of immense pride for us that the vessel was Made in India. The mast however was built by Southern Spars, Cape Town! Yet another inspiring example of the sterling friendship between India and South Africa.

And as *Tarini* heads to Cape Town on the collective prayers and good wishes of 1.3 billion Indians of which over 600 million are women, our two countries gear up to receive these incredible and inspirational women. Who changed *Just do It* to *Just Did It!*
