REMEMBRANCE DAY

Address by the President, Indian Maritime Foundation

Distinguished guests, members of the Indian Maritime Foundation, veterans, members of the maritime fraternity, ladies and gentlemen.

Good morning.

We have gathered here today at this Seamen's War Memorial to observe Remembrance Day and pay our solemn respects to the brave Indian seamen who made the supreme sacrifice during the two World Wars.

As we lay our wreaths today, we remember 7,955 Indian seamen who laid down their lives during World War I and World War II. These were men who went to sea to earn their livelihood, to carry cargo, transport essential supplies and keep the vital arteries of international trade open. They were not soldiers in the conventional sense. Yet, when the world was engulfed in war, they found themselves very much on the front lines.

The oceans, which had traditionally been avenues of commerce and communication, became theatres of conflict. Merchant ships carrying food, fuel, ammunition and other essential supplies became targets of enemy submarines, aircraft and surface raiders. Their crews faced the constant threat of torpedoes, gunfire and mines. Many ships were sunk, and countless seamen lost their lives in the unforgiving waters of the oceans.

These men knew the dangers, yet they continued to sail. Their courage, resilience and sense of duty helped sustain the maritime lifelines on which the war effort, and indeed the survival of millions, depended.

It is important to remember that behind every number in the casualty lists was a human being — a son, a husband, a father, a brother. Each had a family waiting for his return. For many, that return never came.

There is a particularly poignant personal connection to this occasion within our own Indian Maritime Foundation family. Our Vice President, Mr Yezdi Batliwala, lost his father at sea during the Second World War. For Yezdi and his family, this is not simply a remembrance of a historical event; it is a deeply personal memory of a life lost at sea.

His family's loss reminds us that behind every casualty figure was a family whose life was changed forever. The pain of such loss does not end with the war; it is carried across generations. It brings home the fact that the sacrifices we commemorate today are not merely distant historical events. Their impact continues to be felt even today.

Sadly, the contribution and sacrifice of these Indian merchant seamen have not always received the recognition they so richly deserve. While we rightly remember the sacrifices of our armed forces, we must also acknowledge those who served in the Merchant Navy and whose courage and sacrifice were no less significant.

The Indian Maritime Foundation considers it both a privilege and a responsibility to preserve this important chapter of our maritime history.

This memorial, constructed by the Indian Maritime Foundation at Bund Garden, stands as a lasting tribute to these brave seafarers. It is more than a structure of stone. It is a symbol of our gratitude, a reminder of their sacrifice, and a commitment that their contribution will never be forgotten.

As President of the Indian Maritime Foundation, I would like to emphasise that remembrance must go beyond an annual ceremony. We must ensure that younger generations, particularly students and those entering the maritime profession, understand the sacrifices made by their predecessors. They must appreciate that the freedoms and opportunities we enjoy today have often come at a very heavy price.

There is also a contemporary relevance to this remembrance. Even today, seafarers continue to face grave dangers in different parts of the world. In recent years, merchant ships and their crews have been caught in the crossfire of geopolitical conflicts, despite having no part in them. They are innocent professionals carrying out legitimate duties, often thousands of miles away from home.

The lessons of the World Wars remain relevant: the safety of seafarers, the freedom of navigation and the protection of merchant shipping must remain a shared international responsibility.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we stand before this memorial, let us pause to reflect on the extraordinary courage of those 7,955 Indian seamen. Let us remember their names, their families and their sacrifice. May their story inspire us to accord the Merchant Navy and its seafarers the recognition and respect they deserve.

On behalf of the Indian Maritime Foundation, I offer our deepest homage to these brave men. They sailed into danger so that the world could carry on. They may have been lost at sea, but they must never be lost to history.

May their souls rest in eternal peace.

Lest We Forget.

Jai Hind