Citation

Capt Sharad Sinsunwal is presently the Commanding Officer of INS Kolkata. The ship was deployed for Operation 'Piracy in the Gulf of Aden,' from 16 Dec 23 onwards. The deployment was triggered by continuous missile attacks by Houthi rebels on merchant vessels. A total of 27 attacks took place during the time Kolkata was in the region, severely damaging 13 ships and resulting in loss of lives of sailors. Several of these hits took place within a few miles of Kolkata, thereby putting the ship in real and continuous danger. An additional threat was from Somali pirates, who were using the unrest in the region to highjack merchant vessels. Notwithstanding these dangers, Kolkata repeatedly rendered assistance to missile-hit merchant vessels, rescuing 67 lives and freeing 17 hostages from pirates. Four incidents stood out.

On 22 Feb, Merchant Vessel *Islander* was attacked 70 nm SE of Aden by two anti-ship ballistic missiles. The vessel called desperately for help. Captain Sharad Sinsunwal took the bold and selfless decision of rushing his ship to *Islander's* assistance, despite the high possibility of the next missile hitting *Kolkata*. In the fading light and rough seas the Captain sent an explosive disposal and medical team from *Kolkata* on the merchant vessel, rendering it safe for further voyage.

The second incident took place on 04 Mar 24 at about 1500h. Merchant Vessel *MSC Sky* II was attacked by two Houthi ballistic missiles and was on fire. Its 13 Indian crew immediately called for help. Once again, Captain Sharad Sinsunwal took the fearless decision of charging into the missile probability area and rendering assistance. Furthermore, notwithstanding the danger posed by the fire on *MSC Sky II*, the Captain sent his team onboard. They, inspired by the leadership and determination of their Captain, rose handsomely to the occasion and extinguished the fire in 3h 30min.

The next incident took place at about 1605 h on 06 Mar 24, wherein Merchant Vessel *True Confidence*, was hit by two Houthi missiles and was ablaze. For the third time, Captain Sharad Sinsunwal took his ship into the missile threat zone to rescue the crew, who had abandoned the ship. This was despite the increased frequency of missle attacks and increasing beligerence from the Houthis. Captain Sharad Sinsunwal located the crew members of *True Confidence* in a small life raft in the open sea and initiated the operation of rescuing them using helicopter and boat, in a very rough weather. Out of the 24 crew members, three had died in the missile attack and three more had suffered critical injuries like amputated leg, facial burns and shrapnel in intestine etc. The complex task of bringing the survivors from the liferaft to *Kolkata* required coordination of multiple teams in a dynamic and tense situation, with the ever

present threat of missile attack. Captain Sharad Sinsunwal led by personal example, working tirelessly with each team while maneuvering his ship optimally to avoid ballistic missiles. His actions resulted in all survivors being rescued.

The last incident took place from 13-15 Mar 24, when *Kolkata* intercepted the highjacked Merchant Vessel *Ruen*. 35 pirates were holding the crew of 17 Bulgarians and Myanmarese as hostages. The pirates were armed with Rocket Propelled Grenades, machine guns and AK 47s. They fired on *Kolkata* and continually threatened to kill the hostages. In a calibrated and decisive manner *Kolkata* coerced the pirates into submission. This involved firing multiple different kinds of weapons at the pirates over a period of 40 hours, while ensuring the safety of the hostages. To accurately direct the firing Captain Sharad Sinsunwal had to position himself in the direct line of fire. His brave and intelligent action resulted in the surrender of all 35 pirates and rescue of all 17 hostages.

The actions of *Kolkata* in these four incidents resulted in acclaim from international and Indian leaders. For saving Philippine lives on *True Confidence* their President thanked our External Affairs Minister. For rescuing the Bulgarians onboard *Ruen*, their President wrote a note of thanks to the President of India. Furthermore, an acknowledgement of the ship's efforts was also made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In planning and executing these operations in the face of missile danger and pirate attack, Captain Sharad Sinsunwal displayed boldness, quick decision-making, leadership, selflessness and commitment to duty. He repeatedly placed his life at risk and motivated his crew through personal example. For actions taken by him to rescue the 21 crew members of *True Confidence*, fighting fire to save the ship *MSC Sky* II, rendering assistane to *Islander* and rescuing 17 hostages on *Ruen* from heavily armed pirates, Captain Sharad Sinsuwal is strongly recommended for award of Shaurya Chakra.

Name: Lt Cdr Kapil Yadav - Shaurya Chakra

Citation

- 1. <u>Introduction</u>. Lt Cdr Kapil Yadav is undertaking the duties of Assistant Engineer Officer (AEO) onboard. The ship whilst deployed for Op PoG received distress call from Merchant Vessel (MV) Marlin Luanda, an oil tanker carrying highly inflammable Naphtha, at 2220 h on 26 Jan 24 due to a major fire onboard post missile attack. The ship immediately responded and proceeded to provide assistance and reached in the vicinity of the distressed vessel at 0400 hrs on 27 Jan 24. Due to the lack of the firefighting expertise and the increasing fire onboard the Master of MV Marlin Luanda requested for assistance. The command decision was to assist the distressed vessel which had a crew of 27 people (24 Indians, one Bangladeshi and two Sri Lankan nationals).
- Gallantry Act. The Officer volunteered to board the MV Marlin Luanda and 2. fight fire. The MV was carrying Naphtha, a highly hazardous material as enlisted by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Hazard Communication Standard (29 CFR 1910.1200). It's an extremely flammable material that causes irritation to eyes and affects central nervous system/ respiratory system if inhaled and proves fatal if swallowed. On reaching the merchant vessel, the Officer used his technical expertise to quickly understand the system onboard the MV. When the initial firefighting did not yield desired results, he prepared a metal plate by welding the metal sheets onsite. The Officer continued to fight fire valiantly and with complete disregard to his personal safety, walked through the raging fire in temperatures excess of 700° C amidst harmful gases and covered the hole on the fuel tank, due to the missile impact, by the metal plate. This proved instrumental in cutting off the oxygen supply and aided in extinguishing fire that was raging for last 18 hours and brought under control after six hours of continuous firefighting.
- **Recommendation**. The Officer has displayed immense grit, determination and leadership qualities in face of adversity wherein the raging flames were already creating havoc for last 18 hours. He disregarded his personal safety and continued to fight fire. His gallant act and technical expertise, where other coalition warships despite being at the scene of action were hesitant to offer help, has projected Indian Navy's image positively and has immensely amplified its reputation world over. The same was also reflected by the message from the Master of the vessel in distress. The Officer's unwavering grit, fighting spirit and the resolve under adverse conditions saved invaluable lives and are keeping with the highest values of service and merits recognition. The Officer is strongly recommended for **Shaurya Chakra**.