

Special Event
BUILDING BRIDGES ACROSS CHESS BOARD
Sweden India Latvia

Stockholm
20 March 2023

Remarks by Ambassador
Tanmaya Lal

Ambassador Ilse Ruse, *Ambassador of Latvia to Sweden*
Ms. Dana Reizniece-Ozola, *Managing Director FIDE and former Minister in Latvia*
Mr. Jesper Hall,
Mr. Carl Fredrik Johansson,
Mr. Nick Andersson, *Stockholm School of Economics*
Mr. Jan Ståhlberg, *CEO*
Mr. Ramesh Babu, *renowned coach*
Ms. Linda Beijer, *Head Kulturhuset*
All other distinguished guests and chess players and chess lovers

We are delighted to welcome you at the Indian Embassy this evening.

The idea for this somewhat unusual get-together had emerged during our recent meetings with Mr. Hall and his colleagues.

We thought it may be interesting to bring different stakeholders together from Sweden, Latvia and India and see what may come out.

Why Chess ?

Well, chess is a global game that is truly inclusive. The appeal of chess is growing fast. And technology and AI are now transforming the game.

Online chess and streaming have boomed during pandemic. The popularity of Queen's Gambit movie has also catalysed interest.

All three of our countries have long and strong traditions in chess.

Chess is believed to have originated in India more than a millennium ago and then travelled on global trading routes far and wide, east and west across empires and continents.

While Chess may have had its origins in India, chess clubs and tournaments started around 200 years ago in the West.

FIDE became one of first international sporting federations to be established 100 years ago.

In fact, FIDE website indicates that millions of players play chess daily.

Recognising its growing appeal and value, three years ago before pandemic struck, the United Nations designated 20 July as the World Chess Day. The UN website says that as many as 600 million adults play chess regularly.

Chess is now catching up fast in India, facilitated by visibility, growing affluence and technology.

The first Indian to become a grandmaster was nearly 40 years after FIDE started this ranking in 1950. The number has now crossed 80, of which around 50 have qualified in the last ten years alone.

Some months back Chennai, the Chess capital of India, hosted a very successful Chess Olympiad.

In Sweden the famous Rilton Cup is more than 50 years old. Indian and Latvian players are competing in large numbers there and also emerging as winners.

It was fascinating to meet some young Indian players at Rilton Cup recently, who were traveling with their mothers or friends across Europe. This requires huge commitment and investment and reflects a big change from only a few years back.

Latvia has produced legendary chess players and has a strong chess base. Indian players also compete there regularly.

And today we are fortunate to have among us Woman Grand master Ms. Dana Reizniece-Ozola, who has also served as a Minister in the Latvian government and is now serving as Managing Director at the International Chess Federation FIDE.

Chess is an individual sport but today top players have formidable teams assisting them.

Both young and old can compete across the chess board.

While there are different streams for men & women, they can also compete with each other on equal terms.

Chess not only bridges gender, age and physical ability but also language and now geographies with online play.

Chess can be hugely empowering as we can see in inspirational stories like Queen of Katwe about a young Ugandan chess prodigy from very underprivileged background.

Chess can also have huge benefits in terms of health, creativity, problem solving, motivation and so on.

Over the last few years, Chess formats are evolving and becoming incredibly fast and furious, and require much different skills and styles of play.

Technology is completely transforming the game.

Vast amounts of data on past games are now available and accessible to players. Expert human and computer analysis of moves and games is available instantly.

Although AI-led computers can now easily outplay humans, this has not diminished interest in chess.

On the contrary, its popularity is booming with the shorter formats and online play.

Streaming by experts and access to chess engines also generates huge interest and opportunity to understand the game much more widely.

Young women influencers like Anna Cramling or Tanya Sachdev have huge following.

Many of us in India started playing some chess at home taught by family and have played with our grandparents.

My first major exposure to top players was during my posting in Iran when Vishwanathan Anand became the first Indian to become world chess champion in Tehran.

It has also been a privilege also to interact with chess icon Pia Cramling here in Stockholm. She told me how she became a more confident player after she became a mother. We also chatted on what it meant for senior players like her to compete with players several decades younger.

We are excited to have with us two chess prodigies Praggnanandhaa and Raunak Sadhwani, who are making waves in prestigious tournaments, often overcoming much higher rated Champions.

I had met Ramesh Babu some months back here in Stockholm when he had been invited by Mr. Jesper Hall and his colleagues. It was enlightening to hear his talk about chess coaching, chess ratings and chess engines. What impressed me the most was some of the counter intuitive insights and lessons, which are valid beyond chess.

Chess is finally attracting corporate interest also as it continues to increase its fan base.

Tata Steel, of course, sponsors major chess tournaments including in Europe. Other Indian IT companies such as TCS and HCL also sponsor cross country racing and women's ice hockey here in Sweden.

It is great to have friends from Centre for Business and Sports from the prestigious Stockholm School of Economics with us here today.

With them, we have been exploring possibilities of collaboration beyond competing and coaching, going into research, sports tech, professional management and collaborations between institutes of excellence.

We look forward to the various presentations looking at Chess from different angles and exploring possibilities of collaborations.

We also look forward to the exciting Simul games with the two Indian chess prodigies later in the programme.

So today, this is just a first move.

We hope that this event can be a small stepping stone to some useful linkages.

Thank you all for joining us today.
