

Keynote Address



Honourable Ruwan Wijewardene, M.P.
The Minister of Mass Media and State Minister of Defence,
Sri Lanka

Admiral of the Fleet Wasantha Karannagoda,
Secretaries of Ministries,
Chief of Defence Staff,
Commanders of the Army, Navy and Air Force
Inspector General of Police,
Excellencies,
Dignitaries
Distinguished Invitees
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good morning.

At the outset of the conference, let me congratulate the Ministry of Defence and the Sri Lanka Navy for organizing this year's Galle Dialogue International Maritime conference for the tenth consecutive year.

Galle Dialogue since its inception in 2010 has created a forum for all stakeholders to express their opinions for safety and security of the maritime domain through cooperation, collaboration and partnerships. Since then the forum has attracted players from the region and beyond to visit this annual gathering to network and renew association just as the role played by the Port of Galle many centuries back.

A large number of senior maritime professionals of the navies around the world as well as representatives from several international organizations have gathered today in Colombo to discuss issues that are relevant to maritime affairs under a very timely theme "**Refining Mindset to Address Transnational Maritime Threats; A Review of the Decade**"

Today, cooperation and partnership among nations have become a realistic approach in addressing global issues. Various interested communities are looking for opportunities to establish partnerships with their counterparts in terms of mutual agreement, in trade, in defence etc. In this backdrop, maritime stakeholders must strive to enhance maritime security through cooperation with friendly nations, as we all have understood the importance of working together rather than in isolation, for better result.

The IOR maritime domain and its affairs have become one of the crucial factors that

decide and influence present, as well as future maritime affairs. As all of you are aware, that the Indo-Asia Pacific region is fast becoming the centre of gravity in world affairs. The Indian Ocean and its affairs, therefore, play a vital role in today's global interactions.

The oceans will continue to be the main highways of trade in the foreseeable future. They also will continue to be the meeting ground of nations with their interests and ideologies, sometimes in accord and sometimes in conflict with one another. Moreover, they will constitute the hope of mankind in search of new sources of sustenance. All in all, they will remain everything to mankind as it has been since the beginning.

The position of Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean plays a vital role in the maritime route of the East and West. The distance between the strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca is approximately 2000 miles and our island is situated almost in the centre of this very important Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOC). Historians consider 'Sri Lanka as the oceanic cockpit of Asia' which can act as strong gateways to the region and control the historical maritime involvements in the IOR. Further, throughout the history it has facilitated the outsiders with "an entry point, a midpoint meeting place, a harbour, an emporium for international merchandise, and a landfall". This emphasizes that the strategic importance of Sri Lanka in history is much bigger compared to its small size.

Sea trade is not a new concept for the countries of the IOR as well. It goes back to many centuries where traders and seafarers transported commodities from East to West and vice- a-versa. At present 90 percent of world trade takes place through the sea. One half of the entire world's container traffic passes through the IOR. The sea lane of communication (SLOC) in the IOR is strategically very important to the entire world. Any disturbance or interruption to unimpeded flow of this traffic would create a huge influence on the world economy.

As a vast amount of energy related products and finished products of goods of the world traverse the Indian Ocean, the sustainable and uninterrupted flow of traffic in this route is essential for the economic development. Therefore, the International community has a huge concern for the region's security both in the sea and the land.

Transnational threats are becoming as one of the major security issues in the IOR. Different extremist religious groups and terrorists are using this maritime domain extensively for their activities. This has endangered the security of the major sea routes of the Indian Ocean. In the future, the situation will be worse with the rise of illicit arms trade and drug trafficking in the region. Further, policing the vast ocean creates a huge challenge specially in dealing with the illegal movement of Narcotics and migrants.

Fortified with the advantage of this unique position in the Indian Ocean, we are looking at the future with great expectations to regain our maritime glory in the Indian Ocean by promoting trade and tourism so that we can make Sri Lanka an important maritime node in this vital sea stretch. I am confident that our present, as well as future contributions in the fields of trade, energy, and security will be able to make a significant impact on the Indian Ocean Region

Above all, Sri Lanka has an enormous responsibility in ensuring the continuous flow within this vital lifeline. The principal conditions affecting the Sea Power of nations are primarily their geographical position, their size and extent of coastline; the quantity of their sea-borne trade and the threat to it, maritime ambitions of their neighbours, and finally the will of its people, and resolve her leaders and the government. As no nation can address challenges and threats in the maritime domain in isolation, we too seek cooperation and assistance from all nations to ensure that the Indian Ocean is kept free from all threats and challenges are faced together.

Many countries have assisted us in numerous ways, and several other countries have indicated their willingness and in fact, engaged themselves in developing our maritime capabilities and capacities.

I strongly believe that our future will depend very much on the seas that are surrounding us. This vast sea area comprises huge amount of resources. This potential is more than capable of taking Sri Lanka forward into the future. It will be our key to achieving sustainable development.

Sri Lanka recognises the value of Freedom of Navigation and the smooth flow of trade and energy across the Indian Ocean as a common norm abided by each and every peaceful nation. Therefore, Sri Lanka will delight to take part in any initiative that helps to protect this vital Freedom of Navigation and the smooth flow of trade and energy. In doing so, we are ready to work with our regional as well as global partners.

Dr Robert D Kaplan in his book "Monsoon" has mentioned that "No ocean is in need of strategic stability more than the Indian Ocean, which is arguably the most nuclearized of the seven seas". Having understood this statement, the Indian Ocean is considered by many as the 'emerging global centre of gravity' and the place where the 21st Century's power dynamics is revealed. Therefore, all of us present here have an enormous responsibility to ensure the well-being of our future generations. The responsibility is to ensure that our Oceans are only used for the betterment of humankind and nothing else.

We understand that no country is capable of handling maritime security threats and challenges in isolation, no matter how advanced and developed it might be. The need is to think globally and engage in a structured and a cooperative mechanism in view to effectively address the maritime security threats and challenges. It is proven that all stake holders of the conference have been discussing their

individual efforts to mitigate the transnational threats in the region yet; achieving a common mind set to mitigate the issues is paramount.

Hence, I am fully confident that the Galle Dialogue 2019 is an eye-opening forum to understand the issues in IOR and establish a common mind-set. In addition, this endeavour will focus on preparing for the future with a revised structure offering a cooperative mechanism and a renewed "mind-set" to address transnational maritime threats based on the experiences of the stakeholders in last 10 years.

I wish Gall Dialogue 2019 all the success.
Thank You!