

Hon. State Minister of Defence's Speech



Hon. Ruwan Wijewardene State Minister of Defence, Sri Lanka

His Excellency the president of the democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Defence Minister, and Commander –in Chief of the Armed Force, (His Excellency Maithripala Sirisena)
Governor of the Central Bank,
Chief of Defence Staff,
Commanders of the Army, Navy and Air Force
Inspector General of Police,
Excellences,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good morning

Let me congratulate the Ministry of Defence and Sri Lanka Navy for organizing this year's Galle Dialogue international maritime Conference, for the seventh consecutive year.

Today, the Galle Dialogue International Maritime Conference has become an important international maritime conference in our region. A large number of maritime professional from the navies around the world as well as a number of international organizations have gathered today here in Colombo to discuss issues that are relevant to maritime affairs under a very timely theme, "fostering Strategic Maritime Partnerships."

As the Commander of the Navy mentioned and even when you look at regional or global affairs today, you will notice that everyone speaks about establishing partnerships.

Leaders of nations are seeking how best they can make partnerships with other countries. The business community looks for opportunities in establishing partnerships with their counterparts. The Armed Forces took look for fostering stronger partnerships with friendly nations. This is simply because we have understood the importance of working together rather than in isolation.

The importance of fostering stronger partnerships among the maritime community holds a great deal of significant than never before.

The maritime domain and its affairs today have become one of the crucial factors that have the ability to decide and influence present as well as future affairs to greater extent.

International conference like the Galle Dialogue therefore can play a major role in providing a platform for the much needed discussion and medium to form strong partnerships especially among the maritime community.

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

The value of Sri Lanka's strategic location in the Indian Ocean is indeed a great strength to us. If we look at our history, one could see that Sri Lanka even at that time had a very rich maritime heritage.

The connectivity to East and West was primarily through our island nation. We were very much a part of the ancient maritime silk route and were known by ocean travelers as great maritime trade hub.

Having the advantage of this unique position in the Indian Ocean, we are looking at the future with great expectation to regain our maritime glory in the Indian Ocean by mainly promoting trade and tourism so that we can make Sri Lanka a vital maritime node in the Indian Ocean.

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 the Indian Ocean Region.

If you look at the transshipment sector, we facilitate nearly 70% transshipment of the Indian subcontinent. A very vital shipping highway run just South of Sri Lanka carrying energy and trade to the East and West. We expect a major leap forwarded on this field in the coming few years.

Apart from the above, Sri Lanka has a huge responsibility in ensuring the continuous flow of this vital lifeline. As no nation is capable of addressing challengers and threats in the maritime domain in isolation, we too seek cooperation and coordination from all nations to ensure that the Indian Ocean is kept free from all treats and challengers.

I must especially mention here the unconditional support that Sri Lanka has been receiving mainly in the last year from our friendly nations in this regard.

Many countries have assisted us in numerous ways and many more have indicated their willingness to develop our maritime capabilities.

I strong believe that our future lies very much in the Oceans that surround us. If you take Sri Lanka as an example, we have identified the huge potential that is vested in the seas around us.

This potential is more than capable of taking Sri Lanka towards the future. This potential will be our key to achieving sustainable development.

Importantly, Sri Lanka recognized the value of 'freedom of navigation' and the smooth flow of trade and energy across the Indian Ocean to other parts of the globe.

Sri Lanka will be more than happy to take part in any initiative that helps to protect the freedom of navigation and smooth flow of trade and energy. In doing so, we are ready to work with our regional as well as global partners.

The immense potential in the Indian Ocean as well as other oceans has resulted in creating tension among nations. The only solution for such issues is to take to each other and to build the much needed trust and confidence.

Like the Oceans around the global, we as nations need to have seamless frameworks to address all our issues in a more cooperative way.

The Indian Ocean in considered by many as the 'emerging center of gravity' and the place where the 21st Century's power dynamics is revealed. Therefore, all of us present here have a responsibility towards our future generation.

That responsibility is nothing but to ensure that our Ocean are ONLY used for the betterment of human kind but nothing else.

I am confident that this forum will be able to address some of the pressing issues in the maritime sphere in the coming few days and seek ways and means to foster stronger maritime partnerships for the betterment of everyone.

I wish Gall Dialogue 2016 all the success.

Thank You !