

CNS Address at 7th Galle Dialogue on 28 November 2016
Benefits of Strategic Maritime Partnerships : An Indian Perspective

1. Shri Maithripala Sirisena, the Hon'ble President of Sri Lanka, Shri Ranil Wickramasinghe Vice Admiral RC Wijegunaratne, Commander of the Sri Lanka Navy, Chiefs of Navy of participating countries, eminent personalities representing nations (from the Indian Ocean and world communities), distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

2. It is indeed an honour and a proud privilege for me to share my thoughts with such an eminent audience. I sincerely thank the Sri Lankan Navy for affording me this opportunity.

3. Over the years, Galle dialogue has gained significant importance. The earlier editions of the Galle Dialogue were largely centered on identifying 'challenges to maritime cooperation'. The theme 'fostering strategic maritime partnerships', this year, is indicative of the distance that we have traversed.

4. The conduct of a series of multilateral maritime cooperative events this year, starting with the 5th biennial assembly of IONS at Dhaka (Jan 16), the International Fleet Review at Visakhapatnam (Feb 16), the Middle East Naval Commanders Conference at Qatar (Mar 16), the Indian Ocean Conference at Singapore(Sep 16), the 16thIORA Council of Ministers Meeting at Bali (Oct 16), and now, the 7th edition of Galle Dialogue, are all indicative of an increasing regional acceptance of the need to come together.

5. This edition of Galle Dialogue comes at a time when warm and cordial relations between India and Sri Lanka are stronger than ever before. It is of particular significance that our strong bonds are ascribed to maritime trade, culture and religious interactions for ages. Sri Lanka is India's closest maritime neighbour, just across the 'Gulf'.

6. Before I touch upon India's perspective on the topic, I will briefly touch upon the strategic trends, that are the drivers for maritime partnerships.

7. Firstly, globalisation has cut across national boundaries. It has enabled linkages between cultures, economies and people and interlinked economies of the world.

8. The second driver is the critical importance of energy security. A disruption to the free flow of energy can lead to major conflict. As the Indian Ocean represents the supply side of energy, ensuring its security is imperative.

9. The third driver is the prominent presence of non-traditional threats in the Indian Ocean. These include piracy, maritime terrorism, gun-running, drug smuggling, illegal Fishing, illegal immigration, and many more. Being trans-national in character, addressing these threats requires collaboration.

10. Lastly, the adverse impacts of climate change on human security are highly significant in the context of Indian Ocean, owing to high population densities, particularly in our coastal regions. The Indian Ocean hosts some of the flattest littorals on earth, making them highly vulnerable to the rising sea level.

11. Ladies and Gentlemen, fostering strategic maritime partnerships in the region would certainly help evolve a more integrated view of the region. It is beyond doubt that regional actors have a better understanding of the local patterns of relations and interactions. The Indian Ocean Region denotes such a region.

12. I feel, there are two key pillars of strategic maritime partnerships. These are collaboration for harnessing the potential of Blue Economy and Maritime Security Cooperation.

13. Strategic maritime partnerships are underpinned by economic cooperation. Therefore, I see tremendous potential in regional players working together to harness the Blue Economy.

14. Today, the Indian Ocean Region has emerged as the hub of global economic growth and interconnectivity.

15. The Indian Ocean Region is also home to about a third of world's humanity. It is rich in oil as well as mineral reserves. Several economies of the IOR littorals, depend exclusively on oceans, ports and ships.

16. The region is also extremely rich in fish and other marine resources and its rich hydrocarbon reserves, especially from the West Asia, fuel the global economy.

17. The IOR has some of the busiest sea lanes transporting the highest tonnage of goods in the world. Almost 100 thousand ships pass through the Indian Ocean Region annually, transporting two thirds of the world's oil shipments, one third of its bulk cargo, and half the world's container traffic. It is of significance that only 20% of trade carried by

merchant ships through the Indian Ocean is intra-regional. Disruption to the free flow of trade through the Indian Ocean impacts the entire global economy.

18. All these factors offer opportunities for development of the region's Blue economy. However, the lack of adequate maritime infrastructure in most countries has held them back from realising the true potential of the seas.

19. Ladies and Gentlemen, India's maritime heritage is characterised by a range of peaceful cultural exchanges and trade endeavours. The same impulse governs India's maritime outlook even today.

20. India's approach towards the Indian Ocean Region has been clearly enunciated by the vision of our Hon'ble Prime Minister in the acronym SAGAR, or OCEAN in Hindi language, and stands for 'Security and Growth for All in the Region'.

21. India's vision for the region is rooted in advancing cooperation and using our capabilities for the larger benefit of the entire region.

22. The second vital pillar of Strategic Maritime Partnerships is cooperation for maritime security.

23. Ladies and Gentlemen, you will agree that securing the region's maritime resources, countering the multifarious challenges, and ensuring the smooth flow of world trade is not a small task.

24. India and the Indian Navy take this challenge seriously. We have initiated a series of steps to contribute to the net security in IOR.

25. Expanding presence and operational footprint of the Indian Navy has enabled rapid response to emerging contingencies. This has been aptly demonstrated in relief efforts in recent times, by our forces, in Maldives and Yemen.

26. With the passage of time, the responsibility of securing the seas of our region has become an increasingly collective one, with participation of all regional navies.

27. Our initiative for exchange of white-shipping information with various friendly countries is aimed at enhancing regional Maritime Domain Awareness.

28. Our active participation in anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden and off the Horn of Africa; joint EEZ patrols in the waters of Maldives, Seychelles, and Mauritius; and Coordinated Patrols (CORPATs) with Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia, have helped secure these regions against a range of threats.

29. The success of maritime cooperative action against piracy in the Gulf of Aden is perhaps, one of the best examples of the benefits of a cooperative approach, resulting in nil piracy incidents in the region since 2014.

30. Maritime cooperation has enabled optimum utilisation of available resources, making our operations cost effective and efficient. Partnerships in the maritime domain have also helped progress mutual development through Transfer of Technology and hardware for the region's benefit.

31. The Indian Navy's regional cooperation initiatives are therefore aimed at sharing resources and enhancing regional capacities and capabilities.

32. For a free and secure maritime environment, it is imperative that there is a shared commitment from maritime nations across the region. While the individual capacities and capabilities of the IOR littorals remain rather limited, the region's aggregate is substantial. We must therefore harness the strengths of all resident countries and come together to augment the region's Blue Economy and strengthen maritime security.

33. Resource competition, energy security, economic issues and environmental pressures have moved the Indian Ocean Region to the global centre stage. The challenges can only be met through a unified and rules-based approach.

34. From India's perspective, the deep meaning of regional integration connotes friendship between regional littorals. These thoughts are reflective in our government's 'neighbourhood first policy', which is already enabling our neighbouring countries to work together.

35. Ladies and Gentlemen, it is up to us, to bring about as much or as little change as we desire in OUR region. The synergy that results from co-operative engagement often renders disproportionate results.

36. India has taken several initiatives towards this that include the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and MILAN.

37. The IONS was founded in February 2008 at New Delhi as 21st century's first significant international maritime-security initiative. It aimed to address multifarious challenges through a unified approach, harnessing the combined maritime potential of our region.

38. Our thought process from the beginning has been hinged on the principles of equality and consensus-building, and focussed on common regional problems of maritime-security. We were particular that respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence, non-interference in internal affairs, peaceful co-existence and mutual benefit remained the guiding rules.

39. The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) is another avenue for strengthening cooperation. In recent years the efforts of IORA and IONS are being synergised, as seen in the IORA endorsement of maritime security cooperation as a priority area. Incidentally, all 20 members of IORA also have their navies as members of IONS.

40. It is of significance that the littorals of the Indian Ocean Region have come together through IONS and IORA over the last two years. A mechanism that brings together the IONS and IORA, to evolve an action oriented framework to address key maritime issues, could perhaps render more cogent results.

41. Another initiative is the MILAN series of interactions, that commenced in 1995 with a strength of five nations. It has emerged as a popular event that promotes professional and social interaction amongst naval crews and delegations, and provides a platform for fostering greater understanding.

42. There is certainly a need for developing a favourable and positive maritime security environment. I would like to highlight three specific areas which can help the navies and cooperative constructs alike.

43. First, is Information Sharing. Effective and real-time information flow to develop a robust information grid is the first pre-requisite to addressing any maritime challenge. A shared information grid would provide for exchange of MDA, meteorological, seismic, radar, communications and other data that can help forecast and deal with severe events or disasters.

44. The second aspect that merits our immediate attention is Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief. Several nations have initiated measures to strengthen their capabilities. It is vital that we pool our capacity. Our region's HADR capabilities need to be consolidated under the IONS umbrella. This would enable optimal utilisation of assets and efficient conduct of HADR operations. We could also consider establishing an Indian Ocean Region HADR coordination centre riding on the shared information grid, that I spoke of earlier.

45. The third focus area can be the conduct of Maritime Security Operations. Cooperation by navies of the world towards anti-piracy has met with significant success in curbing piracy. The challenges of Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, piracy, maritime terrorism, and marine trafficking can also be tackled by a cooperative effort. We could consider regional architectures for maritime security cooperation, under the umbrella of IONS.

46. In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to reiterate that the Indian Ocean holds immense promise for political, economic and

maritime security co-operation. It is beyond doubt that the threats and challenges, and the opportunities that it offers, cannot be managed single-handedly.

47. The challenges and opportunities provided by the Indian Ocean necessitate a cooperative and collaborative approach.

48. The theme for today's conference aptly suggests that we are now perhaps ready to take the next step as far as maritime partnerships in the region are concerned.

49. I am certain that deliberations at this edition of the Galle Dialogue will help us identify firm contours for establishing new strategic maritime partnerships, and help realise the true potential of our region. The challenges may seem overwhelming, but they are certainly not insurmountable.

50. Finally, it is up to us to harness the opportunities offered by the Indian Ocean arena , only then will we become the catalysts for peace, tranquillity and stability in the Indian Ocean Region.

51. With these words, I thank you for your attention.