

Address by the Chief Guest



Hon. Ruwan Wijewardene MP State Minister of Defence

Her Excellency the former President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka,
Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaranathunga,
Cabinet Ministers,
Hon. Ministers,
Secretaries of Ministries,
Chief of Defence Staff,
Commanders of the Army, Navy and Air Force
Inspector General of Police,
Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good morning.

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

Today, the Galle Dialogue International Maritime Conference has become an important international maritime conference in the calendars of many foreign nations.

A large number of maritime professionals from the navies around the world as well as a number of international organizations have gathered today in Colombo to discuss issues that are relevant to maritime affairs under a very timely

theme, "Greater Maritime Visibility for Enhanced Maritime Security".

Today, leaders of nations are seeking how best they can make partnerships with other countries. The business community is looking for opportunities in establishing partnerships with their counterparts. In such a backdrop, maritime stakeholders must focus their attention on a greater maritime visibility for enhanced maritime security cooperation with friendly nations. This is simply because we have understood the importance of working together rather than in isolation.

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

International maritime conferences like the Galle Dialogue, therefore, can play a crucial role in providing a platform for much-needed discussions and medium to form strong partnerships, especially among the stakeholders in the maritime community.

As all of you are aware, 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.

Sri Lanka's geographic location has meant that it has been at the centre of ancient trading routes linking the East and the West. In today's context, one of the most important Sea Lanes of Communication (SLoC) as well as Sea Lanes of Trade (SLoT) runs just South of Sri Lanka. Over 200 ships transit our waters daily, South of Dondra Head, carrying energy to the Gulf of China, Japan and Korea and reciprocal traffic the other way. The Indian Ocean has also gained increasing prominence in the current era as a very high proportion of the world's seaborne trade takes place across the Indian Ocean.

It was Admiral Alfred T. Mahan (1840-1914) of the United States Navy who is reported to have said that whoever attains maritime supremacy in the Indian Ocean would be a prominent player on the international scene. Admiral Mahan was a great Naval strategic thinker and historian who was in many ways the Naval equivalent of the Army's Clausewitz (General Karl Von Clausewitz of Germany). It was in 1890 that Mahan wrote the famous treatise on 'The influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783' that changed Naval thinking in the United States.

Sri Lanka's strategic location in the Indian Ocean indeed gives us enormous strength to forge ahead with confidence. If you look at our history, you could see that Sri Lanka owned a very rich maritime heritage, spanning many centuries.

The connectivity to the East and the West was primarily through our island nation. We were very much a part of the ancient maritime silk route and were well-known by seafarers as an important maritime trade hub.

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 mainly 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.

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

Apart from the above, Sri Lanka has a huge responsibility in ensuring the continuous flow of 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 number and determination of their population and the understanding and resolve of their leaders and government. As no nation is capable of addressing 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.

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

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

I strongly 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 forward into the future. It will be our key to achieving sustainable development.

Sri Lanka takes cognizance of the value of Freedom of Navigation and the smooth flow of trade and energy across the Indian Ocean to other parts of the globe.

Therefore, Sri Lanka will be more than happy 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.

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

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

The Indian Ocean is 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 an enormous responsibility to ensure the well-being of our future generations.

That 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 structural co-operation mechanism in order to effectively address the maritime security threats and challenges.

Hence, I am fully confident that this forum will pave the way for a greater maritime visibility for enhanced maritime security and the betterment of the region as well as the entire world.

I wish Gall Dialogue 2017 all the success.

Thank You!