

Establishing Information Fusion Centre in Sri Lanka to Reap the Benefit of MDA Already in Place in the Region



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Introduction:

1. Much had been deliberated on the importance of the Indian Ocean in today's global context in numerous international forums and Galle Dialogue is one among them for good reasons. This renewed geo-political interests either from regional or extra-regional players are based on the expanding ocean based economies centred on Indian Ocean. At same time some developments have demonstrated the lacuna of ocean monitoring and policing much to the concern of these players. Therefore, the paper examines the options for reaping the benefits of Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) in the region through establishing a fully-fledged Information Fusion Centre (IFC) in Sri Lanka.

2. The establishment of the Information Fusion Centre in Singapore in April 2009 as the regional maritime information hub was indeed a watershed event. It enhanced maritime situational awareness and made available a platform to provide early warning triggers and actionable information to cue timely regional responses. This demonstrated the high utility of information sharing cooperation through integrated team comprising both International Liaison Officers (ILOs) and Republic of Singapore Navy personnel. This initiative over the time had proven its mettle and has together worked well to facilitate and catalyse maritime

information sharing and collective sense-making in a complex network of information.

3. On April 2018 these efforts were bolstered by the establishment of Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre in Madagascar and these two establishments; in Singapore and in Madagascar, are serving the Indian Ocean littorals and beyond in managing the maritime space for common good. Geographically these two establishments, situated at the extreme ends to each other, provide a wider and encompassing fusion of information in theory. However, the realities are much more complex when fusing the information for collective sense-making. Therefore, this paper argue that there will always be room for additional information fusion centers in complementing each other for better connectivity, sharing and collaboration.

4. In today's information utilization, more the availability of information; raw or processed will be good for informed decision making and in responding to the demands of numerous nature from statesmanship to disaster relief. However, to make sense of this information such need to be configured for sharing among the centers as the strength of these can be made tangible only through prompt action or decision making at places where it matters.

5. The Indian Vice President's statement in Jakarta on 11th Jul 2018 expressing the Government of India's commitment for an IFC is another encouraging development as far as analyzes indicates as it widen and broaden the commitment of stake holders. The intended work plan of India would bolster the regional capacities and capabilities and make each other inter-dependent than before, which would lead to peaceful co-existence of bigger and lesser players of the region.

Sri Lanka; Potentials

6. Sri Lanka as an island nation is situated almost at the central point in between the two entry points to the Indian Ocean. One third of the total distance between these two entry points lay within Sri Lanka's maritime jurisdiction. On co-relating all maritime jurisdictions it is apparent the role the island nation bound to play in keeping the sea lanes free and safe.

7. The traffic densities in the main sea lane of communication connecting the far-east and far-west is of paramount importance as this is the 'global super-highway' that connect the consumer markets and the energy users. The shipping in this main sea lane is dominated by all the world's top shippers and all of them are represented in the island nation as they frequent the deep water harbours of the island nation for their main liners. This makes our ports very crucial for global players in making connectivity to the consumer markets.

8. The shipping industry is dependent primarily on two types of ships for the container transactions; the Main Liners and the Feeders. The Main Liners are the major vessels that connect the Hub Ports whilst the Feeders are the connectors from or to Hub Ports. It is this combination that drive the thriving global trade making safer seas a global concern especially due to the piracy menace once dominated the industry concerns. In this context the Port of Colombo comprising three major terminals is a rising star in the Top Ports of the world and due to deep waters especially of the newly constructed extension, the Colombo Port is having the potentials to reach a slot in Top 20

from its present ranking of Top 30. The Colombo Port has handled 24 million tons of cargo in the first quarter 2018 recording a growth of 13% compared to the first quarter 2017 in its quest to reach the slot in top 20.

9. With increased shipping activities naturally the MDA concerns also will be higher and would demand real-time, updated and authenticated information. Moreover such will not be confined to a single country or to a region thus it is a global affair that such information be shared and disseminated to those relevant probably at a geographically far way location. As all mainliners managed by the world's top 10 shippers are represented in Colombo, this will become the decisive focal point especially due to the increasing transactions taking place in a neighborhood of world's 2nd, 6th and 8th most populace countries.

The connectivity

10. This divert the study of this paper to another integrated component on information sharing; communication connectivity. Sri Lanka, yet again stand at an advantage on this aspect too due to the connectivity the island nation enjoy through the submarine cable network, Sea-Me-We. The following table illustrates the expansion of this global low-cost communication network to which the island is connected to. This connectivity keep the telecommunication tariff low due to technical configurations on which the submarine cable network is built upon.

11. The maritime space of Indian Ocean is well connected with Sri Lanka and studies indicate that maritime management will be better served from the island nation's geographically advantageous position. This includes the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean, encompassing the air space over this maritime space too. For example the User Preferred Routes as promulgated by International Civil Aviation Organization indicate the established air routes over the Indian Ocean which needs to be taken in to account for better response at a time of crisis similar to missing Malaysian Airline in 2015.

12. As published maps illustrate the long distance air routes which ferry global passenger

clientage over the Indian Ocean is of concerns to many nations for reasons well understandable. Therefore, the paper argue that it is the most logical solution to establish an Information fusion center at a crucial juncture and also in between two well reputed Information Fusion Centers to complement the overall objectives of sharing information for better management and decision making.

13. The maritime borne illegal and crime activities are the other aspects of emerging non-traditional threats that the States are forced to handle and the paper does not revisit these threats as they are being discussed far and wide in many forums. However, all these from IUU fishing, Human smuggling, pollution to Drug and Narcotics are happening where the demand is there, which in turn make us to focus on the same region as discussed above due to the population.

14. Having gone through a period of conflicts, in which bitter experiences of neglecting the oceanic sphere was learnt hard with much sacrifices, losses and wastage, Sri Lanka Navy today stand at a threshold of being a partner to maritime safety. With home-made inventions of monitoring coastal waters real-time day and night, the networking benefits were soon reaped by the Navy with success at sea against the asymmetric threats. With deep sea missions to hunt the enemy gun-runners well out of own sphere of influence, the Navy became confident of limited blue-water capabilities. On post-war, the collaborative partnerships to share AIS details and integrated open source digital links assisted the Navy to police the EEZ with confidence and even responding to far-away distress calls in neighboring Search and Rescue Regions thanks to the MDA instruments in place. These are clear indicators of what series of small steps had achieved over the years to serve the global seafarers that Travers the Sri Lankan maritime jurisdiction.

Conclusion:

15. Having considered all these facts of connectivity and geographic location the paper reaffirms that augmentation of present capacities

to transform to fully fledge Information Fusion Centre in Sri Lanka serves and complements the existing architecture of Maritime Domain Awareness of the region. As the center-point it could well be the central connectivity hub for Eastern and Western edges of the Indian Ocean. It is envisaged that Arabian Sea would form up a sub-oceanic sphere of geo-political interest with many developments taking place around its rim nations, whilst the Bay of Bengal form up the other sub-oceanic sphere of interest primarily on climatic interests as scientists studying this bay more closely than before, due to significant impact it brings on weather patterns.

16. Therefore, it is all but sense that reinforces the idea to establish a fully fledge Information Fusion Center at an island that connected the far West and far East many centuries back just like today, where co-existence, inter-dependency and mutual cooperation has been the order of past and future. The paper in conclusion is not focus on duplicating the regional information fusion to compete with already established or centers going to be established, but rather complementing the existing set-up through the advantages of representation, connectivity and the portion of jurisdiction the State is responsible for.

17. In this context, the Sri Lanka Navy's capacities in term of Off-shore Patrol Vessels fleet is intend to be a representation of national interests on the ocean sphere the island nation is blessed with. With these augmented OPVs, now the island's Navy today is capable of reaching to far-corners of EEZ, SRR and even beyond if the situation demands to ensure the maritime space remain safe, secure and serene. Thus, 'synergizing for collaborative maritime management', this year's Galle Dialogue theme leave you with many thoughts to support this paper's topic of 'Establishing Indian Ocean Information Fusion Centre in Sri Lanka to reap the benefit of MDA already in place in the Region'.

Thank you