

GALLE DIALOGUE 2013

ADDRESS BY

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EMERGING MARITIME INTERESTS IN ASIA PACIFIC

AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

1. Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Secretary Ministry of Defence and Urban Development, Government of Sri Lanka, Mr. Lalith Weeratunga, Secretary to the President of Sri Lanka, General Jagath Jayasuriya, Chief of Defence Staff, Vice Admiral Jayanath Colombage, Commander of the Sri Lanka Navy, Lieutenant General Ratnayake, Commander of the Sri Lanka Army, Air Marshal Abeywickrama, Commander of Sri Lanka Air Force, Admiral Sureesh Mehta, Moderator for today's session, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen. Good Morning.

2. It is an absolute honour to have been given this opportunity, at this fourth Galle Dialogue to share my thoughts with such an eminent audience. I would like to sincerely thank the Sri Lankan Navy for affording me the opportunity.

3. Galle dialogue, a relatively recent initiative to promote better understanding of maritime issues, has gained traction and already generated valuable strategic discourse to become an important event. The wide participation today mirrors the theme of this edition, which is centred on the equally diverse Asia-Pacific region.

4. Sri Lanka and India share age-old civilisational and cultural linkages, and common history. Our long struggle against colonialism and commitment to democracy links our value system, ideals and destiny. We look back at our association with pride. My participation in Galle dialogue comes at a time when many of the maritime security issues we have gathered here to discuss, are affecting this part of Indian Ocean Region (IOR). We, in India, see regional cohesion and cooperation as the best approach to confront these challenges.

5. Increasingly, the term 'Asia-Pacific' is being used interchangeably within the strategic community with a relatively new term, 'Indo-Pacific'. This highlights the unique geo-strategic relevance of Indian Ocean within the Asia-Pacific Region. The phraseological fusion 'Indo-Pacific' signifies the metamorphosis of two vibrant regions into a singular geo-political entity, with a strong maritime character blended by Indian and Pacific Oceans. As a potential canvas for global power rivalries and home to past, present and perhaps, future leaders of world economy, the region is set to dominate this century's geo-politics.

6. It is against this backdrop today that, I will touch upon the relevance of Asia-Pacific region to our maritime interests. I shall also attempt to outline the attendant challenges and strategic considerations that shape our outlook to the region.

7. The Asia Pacific has a wide geographical spread, spanning three major continents and cumulatively encompassing nearly half the humanity. Naturally, diversity typifies the region, be it in geography, demography, political systems or socio-economic indices. Eastern Africa, Middle-East, Indian sub-continent, South-East Asia, East Asia and

Oceania constitute the sub-systems, which together form the larger geo-political Asia-Pacific construct. Over millennia, these constituent sub-systems have interacted and transacted in numerous ways, influencing civilisational, political and economic attributes of one another. Of significance is the fact that it is the maritime medium which has principally facilitated such interactions, primarily due to connectivity in transportation and trade. Inter-state relations in the region, inclusive of political and security dimensions, should be seen as a product of these multifaceted engagements.

8. India's commitment to and active participation within the region is historic. For centuries, trade links over the sea connected India with almost every other sub-region of Asia-Pacific. The cultural and political expeditions of ancient Indian kingdoms such as Kalingas, Mauryas, Cholas and Sri Vijayas took them to far flung areas such as Sumatra, Burma, Malayan Peninsula, Java, Thailand and other countries in Indo-China. Recent studies reveal the presence of a network of temples in Quanzhou city of China, attributed to a large settlement of Indian traders dating to the 13th century. Interestingly, there is also an Australian connection. In a scientific paper published early this year, some aboriginal Australians trace as much as 11% of their genomes to

migrants from India, who reached Australia around 4000 years ago. During the colonial period, the plantation and mines based economies in the region were sustained by Indian immigrants. Essentially our interests in Asia-Pacific bear a strong legacy of commercial, political and cultural interface.

9. Today, India enjoys vibrant political and economic relations with Asia-Pacific, not limited only due to Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) and Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) inhabiting most countries of the region. Considering such multi-dimensional interests, Hon'ble Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, aptly summed up the essence of India's outlook to the region while addressing the Plenary Session of India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit in December last year. He said, and I QUOTE *"We see our partnership with ASEAN not merely as a reaffirmation of ties with neighbouring countries or as an instrument of economic development, but also as an integral part of our vision as a stable, secure and prosperous Asia and its surrounding Indian Ocean and Pacific regions."* The underlying nautical foundation, on which India envisions its relationship with the region, is unmistakable.

10. The Asia-Pacific is rich in natural resources, especially hydrocarbons, which fuel the engines of world's leading economies such as US, China and Japan as also rising powers. Owing to depleting resources on land, exploitation of resources in Exclusive Economic Zones and legally allocated areas in deeper waters is receiving greater impetus. India's status as a 'Pioneer Investor' in Indian Ocean, where we have exclusive rights over deep sea mining in an area about 1200 Nm South from our mainland, defines an expanding interest. The mineral-rich Indian Ocean has also attracted extra-regional entities, who have acquired deep-sea mining blocks here. This maritime endowment is likely to gain increasing attention of many more nations, in the years to come.

11. Many littorals in the region, such as Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka as also India, off its Andaman and Nicobar islands, have opened up offshore blocks in their EEZs, for oil and gas exploration. Consequently, commercial enterprises, representing their respective national interests, compete to exploit natural resources in the region, thus creating greater stakes for the countries involved.

12. The Asia-Pacific region is networked by some of the busiest sea lanes of the world. Maritime trade is the backbone of international commerce. A majority of the world's top ten economies are either located here or have strong interests in the region. The maritime trade which traverses through the sea lanes or passes through the many choke points of Asia-Pacific is vital for the economic sustenance of practically the entire globe.

13. Consequently, freedom of navigation and rightful use of the 'global commons' for maritime economic activities are fundamental for the common good of the region. Upholding the principles of 'freedom of navigation' and 'unimpeded lawful commerce' figures prominently in India's considerations for enhancing cooperation in Asia-Pacific.

14. This intense maritime activity in Asia-Pacific, while affording means for fulfilling aspirations of the region, also brings in associated array of its own challenges.

15. Oceans of the world constitute 70% of our planet and are a common heritage of mankind. Therefore, a just oceanic regime facilitating equitable and fair exploitation of resources by nations is

fundamental for their effective governance. In this regard, while United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Seas (UNCLOS) 1982 was a landmark, its implementation has been a challenge in Asia-Pacific.

16. Menace of piracy is not new to the Mariners of Asia-Pacific. A decade ago, the epicentre of piracy was in South-East Asia but more recently it shifted off Somalia. For a brief while, about two years ago, piracy incidents were reported off our L&M Islands. Our robust action in sinking four pirate mother ships was effective and no piracy has been reported in these waters since then. Thus there is a clear case for reverting the IMO promulgated HRA to its original limits and all littorals should work in that direction. A sustained international cooperative anti-piracy effort has been able to contain but not eliminate piracy off Somalia. Like the allegorical mutant hydra, piratical activity tends to emerge in new forms and manifests itself in vulnerable but lucrative sea areas such as now seen off the West Coast of Africa. Piracy, which was earlier a nautical manifestation of robbery, has now transmuted into a web of criminal operations funded through ransoms. Also, it is quite probable that the high ransom earnings from piracy fuel other criminal activities. It is therefore no surprise that the recent audacious terror attack in Nairobi is purported to have its roots in piracy.

17. A particularly adverse fallout of piracy of serious concern is the largely unregulated carriage of armed guards, in uniform or otherwise, and the legal complexities of any armed action which they take in response to pirate attacks. There are close to 140 Private Maritime Security Companies operating in North Indian Ocean, which hire out Privately Contracted Armed Security Personnel or PCASP. The private security personnel shift between vessels at sea, without entering any port or coastal state regulated maritime territory. There are scores of ships operating as floating armouries in North Indian Ocean, outside any coastal state jurisdiction. There are reports that even uniformed combatants from some countries are employed in some cases, on these privately operated floating armouries. At present, there is no international registration or regulation, nor any internationally enforceable law governing these companies or armed personnel. While there is theoretical flag state jurisdiction, in practical terms it is difficult to enforce the same. Just last month, a Sierra Leone flagged vessel 'MV Seaman Guard Ohio', with 25 armed guards and 10 crew of four altogether different nationalities (British, Estonian, Ukrainian and Indian), was apprehended inside Indian Territorial Waters and is currently under investigation. The master was unable to produce authorisation to carry 34 automatic arms and ammunition found

onboard and clarify other details. Lack of any provision or regulation to deal with such vessels or armed personnel is hampering any legal action by the state.

18. More importantly, in the absence of any universally established rules of engagement, innocent mariners such as fishermen could be the target of their indiscretion. Thus there is a pressing need to regulate, through an international mechanism, the proliferation of Private Maritime Security Companies and their activities, which have assumed a quasi-military form and could have adverse security implications, including the possibility of an ingress route for terrorists.

19. Apart from piracy, the Asia-Pacific is also prone to other asymmetric challenges such as drug trafficking, illegal arms trade, human trafficking and most importantly, maritime terrorism. All these have significant ramifications on regional security.

20. Asia-Pacific is the locus of natural disasters, with IOR alone accounting for about 70% of them. The adverse effects of climate change pose grave risks to human security in the region. Rising average temperatures, melting icecaps and glaciers, and rising sea levels directly

threaten human habitats in large swathes of low-lying coastal regions and islands. With time, extreme weather events such as cyclones, floods and droughts would become more frequent and intense. The effects of natural calamities are further aggravated by fragile socio-economic conditions in most of the littoral nations. Cyclone *Phailin*, which affected large swathes on the East Coast of India and Typhoon *Haiyan*, which caused extensive damage in the Phillipines, tested the national capabilities to the core.

21. Ladies and Gentlemen, I have outlined only some of the challenges, there are many more. Given the vast expanse of the oceans, no state alone can ensure security of the 'global commons'. Every state, therefore, has an obligation to contribute to maritime security, where common interests are concerned. Concurrently, the diversity in the capacities of individual nations to address challenges also makes a strong case for cooperative and collective solutions to such common concerns.

22. The peculiarity and commonality of maritime security challenges shared by India, Sri Lanka and Maldives, for example, have driven the three governments to explore avenues for cooperation, through a

Trilateral Dialogue, which commenced in 2011. The ministerial level discussions are progressing well and a roadmap for cooperation has been agreed upon that also includes a scope to add more members to this initiative. Quite naturally, the respective navies would be at the forefront of executing the roadmap.

23. By virtue of our geo-strategic location and maritime capabilities, we are sometimes required to provide assistance in maritime security management in IOR. To that end, on specific request from our maritime neighbours, we provide assistance for capability enhancement and capacity building in terms of EEZ surveillance, anti-piracy patrols, hydrographic survey, technical assistance and naval training.

24. Aligned with India's policy to build and support non-discriminatory norms and institutions, Indian Navy led the launch of Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) in 2008. It is an inclusive and consultative forum, representing a majority of Indian Ocean littoral nations, and has gained critical mass since its inception. Today, the 35 member navies, with many more seeking membership, work together through consultations to evolve common and implementable regional maritime security strategies. The forum is headed in rotation by

members, reflecting the non-partisan and participative nature of the construct. The Indian Navy continues to make qualitative contributions to this initiative. Recently, we hosted an IONS Seminar at Mumbai on 'Role and Expectations of Emerging Navies in Cooperative Engagement for Peace and Stability in the IOR'. While IONS is an exclusively military or naval forum, initiatives such as the Galle Dialogue, hosted by Sri Lanka, another IONS member, help to further strengthen and consolidate the long term objectives of IONS, by facilitating interaction and exchange of views between diverse representatives of many IOR nations. Even as IONS continues to gain momentum, an earlier initiative titled 'MILAN', has continued to be organised at Port Blair, on a biennial basis, to bring together regional navies and maritime agencies. Beginning with just five navies in 1995, in 2014 we expect more than 20 participants from across the Asia-Pacific.

25. Our thrust on maritime security through cooperative mechanisms goes further to include activities such as bilateral exercises, military-to-military dialogue, coordinated patrols and operations, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) activities and security assistance. In fact, in the past four months itself, our ships have been deployed for HADR and maritime security exercises under the

ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) Plus initiative within Asia Pacific.

26. We regularly conduct bilateral coordinated patrols, along shared international maritime boundaries, with the navies of Indonesia and Thailand to address maritime security concerns such as poaching, drugs and human trafficking, and gun running. The maiden bilateral coordinated patrol with Myanmar was undertaken this year and we see participation of more countries into this endeavour.

27. The Asia-Pacific has some admirable examples of cooperation and collaboration to address regional challenges, as evident through initiatives such as ASEAN-ARF, APEC, SAARC and IOR-ARC.

28. The focus must therefore remain on promoting mutual understanding and cooperation to overcome common security challenges. Bilateral interactions between nations of the Asia-Pacific must be aligned to established international arrangements aimed at peaceful coexistence and development, underpinned by respect for sovereignty, mutual trust and dialogue.

29. I am sanguine that over the next two days, the participants of this Dialogue would analyse various challenges confronting states in the Asia-Pacific and generate ideas which could prove useful for enhancing cooperation among nations of the region. I wish the deliberations all success.

30. Thank you ladies and gentlemen for your kind attention.