

Welcome Remarks



Vice Admiral SS Ranasinghe, WWV, RWP, VSV, USP, ndc, psc, AOWC Commander of the Sri Lanka Navy

His Excellency Maithripala Sirisena, the President of the Democratic socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
Cabinet Ministers, State Minister, Secretary to His Excellency the President, Secretaries of Ministries
Excellencies,
Heads of Delegation,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,
A very Good Morning!

It is my great honour and privilege to warmly welcome our Chief Guest, the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Defence Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, His Excellency, Maithripala Sirisena to the Galle Dialogue International maritime Conference -2018.

Let me also extend a very warm welcome to all the other distinguished guests,

Chiefs of Navies, Commanders of Coast Guard and Defence Forces,

Heads of Delegation and delegations, intellectuals,

representatives from International Organizations and Defence Industries.

‘Galle Dialogue-2018’ is our ninth consecutive seminar. The first seminar was conducted in 2010 in order to share our experiences of countering maritime terrorism particularly irregular warfare at sea and lessons learnt with the rest of the world, after eradicating the 30 years of terrorism that plagued the island. Thereafter, subsequent conferences set the stage to discuss maritime security challenges and how to overcome those through constructive, collaborative and cooperative partnerships.

Let me take this opportunity to thank the Secretary Ministry of Defence Mr Kapila Waidyaratne, President’s Counsel, his staff at the Defence Ministry and Foreign Ministry Officials for giving us the much-needed guidance and uninterrupted assistance for the successful conduct of Galle Dialogue maritime seminar

I am delighted to note that today we have 146 Delegates representing 52 Countries and 22 International Organizations as well as Defence Industries in this forum.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, this year’s conference is in line with important maritime strategies and concepts of Maritime Governance and ‘Blue Economy’.

In addition, since our region is very much prone to natural disasters, it is important to discuss Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief. Further, Maritime Domain Awareness in terms of maritime security is also very significant in this forum to have a dialogue.

Being an island nation located in a central position of the Indian Ocean, adopting a Blue Economy is not optional but mandatory for Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has advantages, but also faces challenges due to its position. The major advantages for a Blue Economy include a unique geographical position, high accessibility to ocean resources from a lengthy coastline around the country, closeness to major sea lanes, sovereignty over a significant area of sea compared with the country's land resources, a diverse range of coastal and marine ecosystems and a high potential for tourism and recreation industries.

However, these opportunities also have challenges attached to them. The oceans around the country are highly contested by global powers and being a small player in a global political arena, Sri Lanka has to take a cautious path.

The Government of Sri Lanka has promoted Blue Economy initiative under the 'Sri Lanka NEXT' program in October 2016. This can be considered a timely effort. In addition, the country aspires to become a maritime hub in the region, taking the advantage of its central geographical position and the closeness to major sea lanes. There were some steps taken in this direction, with mixed results. The country has been promoting its image as a tourism destination, with unique marine and coastal attraction, with some success.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, oceans cover an incredible amount of our planet. Unfortunately, most of our oceans haven't been well managed. This is particularly true in places where capability and resources are limited. Different human activities are putting our oceans under threat. Overfishing is reducing fish populations, threatening the supply of nutritious food and

changing marine food webs. Approximately 80% of the pollution in the oceans comes from land, and coastal zones are especially vulnerable to pollutants. Plastics are also particularly problematic with enormous floating rubbish patches forming in the oceans. Climate change and its related impacts, such as ocean acidification, are affecting the survival of some marine species. Coastal development is destroying and degrading important coastal marine ecosystems such as coral reefs, sea grass meadows and mangroves.

We need clean and healthy oceans to support our own health and survival, even if we don't live anywhere near them.

Excellencies, Ladies And gentlemen, I am sure the theme of this year's conference 'Synergizing for Collaborative Maritime Management' will pave the way for regional and extra regional players to express their maritime vision and management, discuss the concerns and better understand each other in order to manage Indian Ocean affairs in a collaborative managerial framework.

Last but not the least, we have to remember the necessity of protecting our future generation by giving them the best opportunity to live in a peaceful and uncorrupted environment. Therefore, maritime strategies must be developed as collective strategies to address common issues. This could achieve with sharing resources, knowledge, technology and mutual understanding among each other. Great power competition with maritime power projection could be used as a tool for helping nations instead of an individual attempt to achieve their strategic objectives. Therefore, this is the high time to put our best foot forward as responsible government officials to work together, with a common vision.

The nature of contemporary maritime challenges to maintain a good order at sea gives us a point to ponder to collaborate with greater intention and give a better prospect for our future generation.

I wish all our foreign friends a wonderful stay here in Colombo and a fruitful two days of knowledge sharing on this year's theme. Thank You!