

**BENEFITS OF STRATEGIC MARITIME  
PARTNERSHIPS : AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE**

1. **Shri Maithripala Sirisena**, the Hon'ble President of Sri Lanka, **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**<sup>1</sup>.

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'**<sup>2</sup>, *this year*, is indicative of the distance that **we have traversed**.

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<sup>1</sup>Salutations to be amended as per final attendees including Sri Lankan Ministers / Government officials.

<sup>2</sup>Theme for Galle Dialogue 2016: Fostering Strategic Maritime Partnerships. As sourced from official website of Galle Dialogue.

4. The conduct of a series of multilateral maritime cooperative events this year, starting with the **5<sup>th</sup> 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 **16<sup>th</sup> IORA Council of Ministers Meeting at Bali** (Oct 16), and now, the **7<sup>th</sup> 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**<sup>3</sup>.

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.

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<sup>3</sup> Island nations, such as Maldives, whose highest points sit only a few metres above sea level, or areas of low-lying coastal areas, such as in Bangladesh, are the most vulnerable. 80% of Maldivian territory has an elevation of one metre or less above sea level. Bangladesh's largest island, Bhola island, situated at the mouth of Meghna river has a population of more than 15,00,000. It is regularly re-shaped by storm surges. In 1995, half of the island had become totally submerged/ flooded, leaving 5,00,000 people homeless.

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**<sup>4</sup>. 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

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<sup>4</sup> The IOR population in 2016 is about 2.725 billions, while the total world population is 7.44 billion, accounting for about 39% of world's population. Sourced from [www.worldometers.info](http://www.worldometers.info).

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**<sup>5</sup> 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**<sup>6</sup> and **Yemen**<sup>7</sup>.

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.

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<sup>5</sup>66% of world's oil, 50% container traffic, and 30% cargo traffic transits through the IOR.

<sup>6</sup>In Dec 14, INS Sukanya and Deepak provided fresh water to Maldives after a major fire broke out at the Male Water and Sewerage Company, disabling Male's distillation plants. IAF aircraft (C-17 and IL-76) also participated in *Op Neer*.

<sup>7</sup> During *Op Rahat* in Apr 16, the Indian Navy safely evacuated 1,783 Indians and 1,291 foreign nationals from Yemen.

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<sup>8</sup>; **joint EEZ patrols** in the waters of **Maldives<sup>9</sup>, Seychelles, and Mauritius<sup>10</sup>**; and **Coordinated Patrols (CORPATs)** with **Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia<sup>11</sup>**, 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.

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<sup>8</sup>Presently, INS Sumedha (since 28 Sep 16), the 60<sup>th</sup> *IN* ship is deployed in the Gulf of Aden. *IN* ships have safely escorted 3,311 ships, including 385 Indian ships since 2009.

<sup>9</sup>*IN/CG* ships and aircraft are deployed for EEZ surveillance off Maldives every month. Presently, a *CG* ship is deployed for the same (Sep – Nov 16). An *IN-Dornier* (from *WNC*) was deployed for EEZ surveillance to Maldives in Aug 16.

<sup>10</sup>INS Shardul is scheduled to undertake EEZ Surveillance off Maldives and Seychelles from 10 Nov – 07 Dec 16.

<sup>11</sup>*IN* undertakes CORPAT with Indonesia (twice a year; last undertaken from 10 – 28 Oct 16; INS Karmuk and one *DO* participated); Thailand (twice a year; scheduled from 16-24 Nov 16; Cheetah and one *DO*), and Myanmar (once a year; last undertaken in Feb 16).

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 21<sup>st</sup> 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<sup>12</sup>. 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.

### **Way Ahead**

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**.

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<sup>12</sup> India, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia and Sri Lanka

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.

### **Conclusion**

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**.

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