

Recent High-Level Visits and Their Indian Ocean Aspects



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**Mr. Rishan de Silva:**

On behalf of the geopolitical cartographer, it is indeed my pleasure to welcome everyone to our discussion event today titled “Recent High-Level Visits and their Indian Ocean Aspects”. As most of you know, the geopolitical cartographer is a Research Foundation that was founded during COVID and specialises in the Indian Ocean. It aims to promote the study's research and analysis of the geopolitical, geoeconomic and maritime affairs developments in the Indian Ocean, Pacific Ocean, and the connected landmass, which are redrawing the global political order. The idea for today's discussion was none other than our founder and patron, the honourable Ranil Wickremesinghe, who serves as Sri Lanka's president, and we hope that this platform can be used to inform you the wider community about the Indian Ocean aspects after the recent high level visits. Today I would like to welcome the following esteemed guests to take a seat at this stage. The honourable Sagala Ratnayaka, chief of staff to the president welcome, Sir. The honourable Aruni Wijewardane Foreign Secretary, welcome. The High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka, His Excellency Gopal Bagley. Welcome. Ambassador of China to Sri Lanka, his Excellency Qi Zhenhong. Welcome. The Ambassador of France to Sri Lanka, His Excellency Jean-François Pactet, welcome. And the ambassador of Japan to Sri Lanka, his Excellency Hideaki Mizukoshi. Welcome.

Thank you all for agreeing to participate in this event and we look forward to an informative discussion. With that, I would like to begin by inviting the Foreign Secretary, Miss Aruni Wijewardane, to moderate the discussion for this evening.

**Ms. Aruni Wijewardane:**

Honourable president. Distinguished guests. Good evening and welcome to this event and thank you very much to Rishan for his introduction to the event. As Rishan outlined, we are here today to discuss or have an exchange of views on the recent high-level visits. Both outward from Sri Lanka and inward into Sri Lanka, with the countries represented on this stage and Rishan has given us an introduction. As you all know, I intend to take this discussion on two aspects. One is what were the main takeaways from the high-level visits from the perspective of bilateral relations and also given the particular focus of the geopolitical cartographer. We see a slide with the ocean on it. What was the? What was the message in relations related to the Indian Ocean? So that is the framework I will choose. So before I start, what is it that the ambassadors and the countries represented on stage, what is it that we all have in common in their bilateral relations with Sri Lanka, all of you, of course, have very long standing bilateral

relations with Sri Lanka, with India and with France, we commemorate 75 years this year, with Japan, seventy and with China for historical reasons sixty-five or so I think. We have also had very recently very high-level interactions with all the countries on this stage. At the head of state level, we have had discussions with India, France and Japan, His Excellency President travelled to all these three countries and the honourable Prime Minister visited China recently. In all the discussions matters related to the Indian ocean featured as part of the discussions. Another common aspect in the partners we see on the stage is the support that we have received from them in our recent active economic stabilisation activities and the strong support in our debt restructuring process. We are very grateful for the very leading role all of them have played with Sri Lanka. Having given that general outline, if I may honourable Sagala and chief of staff to His Excellency the President and national Security Advisor, Sagala Ratnayaka, if I may, I will give you the floor to give a little more thought to what I have just introduced.

**Hon. Sagala Ratnayaka:**

His Excellency the President and the former Speaker, Excellencies, the ambassadors and High Commissioners, ladies and gentlemen, the Foreign Secretary. Thank you. The Indian Ocean region has transformed from being a mere passage of maritime trade to a major global Nexus of players in the security economy. The economic angle, the environment, social issues and of very important strategy. The national interests of States drive the international system. Commonly the system held interest thus can come under threat depending on the various national interests. It is in this sense that Sri Lanka, which is recovering from an economic crisis following the COVID and some policy decisions that led to the economic crisis. The strong revival programme, the trans the, the reform programme it has undertaken has positioned us in having this position of being able to bring in the harmony that is required in the Indian Ocean. Our policy in the Indian Ocean is free and open. Indo Pacific in the Pacific. Also, which includes maritime safety and security in the areas of safety of undersea cables, illegal fishing, illicit trafficking, smuggling, human trafficking and also fighting against climatic disasters and maritime pollution. We saw it ourselves with the debacle of the express. Then on the other side, we also have a responsibility.. So that being. Our main areas of focus are now repositioning ourselves. If we were in a crisis and if we were messy, nobody would. Have looked at us. Nobody would really want to work with us or dependents, so it is the reform process, the strong. Undertaking of the reform process and the stabilisation and the growth that is following it is giving us this niche. To Sri Lanka, key to this will be that restructuring the domestic debt restructuring process is now nearing completion. We still have to enact the Central Bank Act

and following that, we can finish the domestic debt restructuring process and transfer the converted Treasury bills into the bonds. We still will have to complete the Internet bilateral debt restructuring, which in the first round where we needed The Paris Club, India, and China came forward expeditiously to assist us and we're hoping for the same support in this round as well. It is with this background that all our visits and discussions and the visits to Sri Lanka, some of them very high level after a long time of discussions centred around that now when we are when the president visited India, the discussions terminated with the issuance of a vision document. This mission document covered many of the things we discussed and how it works on it. Connectivity being the main and connectivity by Air, Sea, Road, Logistics. The economy that is trading currencies, the digital finance, energy security, they are the connectivity would be a power grid. The pipeline for fuel pushes both to Sri Lanka and Outer Sri Lanka giving that amount of flexibility. The food security, the high tech agriculture, livestock, and dairy in that area, and also tourism India being a mainstay in our tourism industry and education, which the President always emphasises. In all of this, there was emphasis by both leaders that the private sector should take the lead. Was the general trend of what we discussed and how the vision document goes when it comes to India. Then we had visits to Japan, plus the most recent was the visit by the Foreign Minister of Japan to Sri Lanka. There again, climate change and education were discussed. And also Building confidence in Sri Lanka's reform process. Being successful will build the required confidence for Japan to come in and invest in Sri Lanka. Over the past few years, many Japanese investors and other contractors and the private sector that are working here. Have you had experiences which have concerns and they would look at. A fair amount of reform and stabilisation and the laws in place to ensure safety. Then with France We had the. The visit of the president, which was quite an enjoyable evening at 2:00 midnight. At midnight for two hours. At the airport by the plain side. But two very efficient hours of discussion, a lot of discussion again on climate change, including the climate change university. And again, we discussed setting up more, more cooperation in regional maritime safety, especially by setting up the School of Regional Maritime Safety and security, to be based in Trincomalee but affiliated to the Kotelawala Defence University. The China visit was also a very high-powered visit and the President is going to be visiting China very soon for the third belt and Road initiative. His Excellency was there as the Prime Minister in For the first visit, for the first belt and road. Built when it comes to China. We have two. Large Chinese investments in Sri Lanka. One is the port city. The port city had its Fits and started moving along. And right now, we are in the process of consulting on finalising the new laws for it. Those would be attractive to investment investors. Then we also have the Hambanthota

investment. There is a port. Sufficient flow of ships coming through. Because the other plans for the investment zone have not come through. And that will be what was discussed and that will be what would be critical for Hambantota port to reach its potential for Sri Lanka. Jobs will be created with the export industries set up there and the revenue to Sri Lanka will start coming in from there. So, these are all areas that we discussed and much more. I am not going to go into all of them Foreign Secretary, because the ambassadors will also have their views on what was discussed and we can always come in again at any time. Thank you.

**Ms. Aruni Wijewardane:**

Thank you, Sagala, for that quick review of what we are about to discuss. So let me now start in reverse alphabetical order with Japan, this was also the first official visit his Excellency the president made overseas after assuming office. He participated in the funeral ceremony of the former Prime Minister of Japan. Mr Shinzo Abe had an imperial audience with His Majesty the Emperor, held a summit meeting with the Japanese Prime Minister and also met the Foreign Minister of Japan. That was in September last year and then in May this year. Again, His Excellency the president went to address the 28 Nikkei future of Asia conference. But he also had bilateral discussions with the Japanese Prime Minister, Fumio Kishida, Minister of Finance and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Then very recently, in July this year, we had the inward visit by the Foreign Minister Hayashi to Sri Lanka so all this was a very strong interaction between the two sides. His Excellency, the President has talked about resetting our relations with Japan. I know that Japan also spoke to us about your Free and open Indo Pacific policy and you told us that Sri Lanka is a strong partner in this. So may I request you kindly Ambassador Mizukoshi to expand a little bit on this. Thank you!

**H.E. Hideaki Mizukoshi:**

Thank you very much for inviting me to this very important forum and giving me an opportunity to express our views. As has been introduced by Miss. There has been a very frequent high level of interactions between Sri Lanka and Japan since the current Sri Lankan government took office. Throughout these meetings, the number one topic has been how Japan can support Sri Lanka to overcome the economic crisis, including the debt problem. So, these interactions at the summit level and the ministerial levels have been very instrumental in cooperating on these issues. The time that the president visited Japan for the funeral of the former prime minister. Minister, there was a. Last September, just after the staff level meeting with the IMF was agreed, it was a very good moment to discuss cooperation on the problem.

And the second visit in May this year was just after that platform on that restructuring which I initiated by Japan, France and India. It Had just been launched, so it was a start of another stage and also it was a good opportunity for the President to explain to the Japanese Prime Minister about this. On the finance matters and also governance matters, which are very important to regain the trust of the Japanese Government and the business community of Sri Lanka. And also not only is the summit level meeting. The President has the opportunity to speak to the media and also business leaders about his efforts of reforms on the Sri Lankan economy. That was very important. And a timely visit to Japan. And on top of that, there were forty ministers visiting Sri Lanka in July and he had a particularly good opportunity to understand more deeply about what is going on. In Sri Lanka. As has been mentioned by the following Secretary, Secretary, one another topic that has always been discussed is Japan's vision of freedom and open in the Pacific for it. It is an important pillar of our diplomacy. The core principles of our foreign peace, defending freedom and the rule of law and respect for diversity, inclusiveness, and openness. In March this year, Prime Minister Tsuda announced Japan's new plan for void. The new plan makes it clear that South Asia, including Sri Lanka, is one of the key regions. And it offers fifty-one areas of cooperation, such as responding to climate change, disaster prevention and support for startups and digital cooperation. And I would like to emphasise that the vision of the void is an inclusive concept, open to all countries that share its basic principles. As the international community faces various challenges. The void becomes increasingly important to steer the world towards cooperation rather than confrontation or division. And Japan would like to continue our dialogues and to cooperate with this Janka as an equal partner based on this concept. The US outlook on the Pacific into the Pacific has a lot of common points with the concept of free and open in the Pacific. So, when the Foreign Minister visited Sri Lanka, he expressed. Our willingness to cooperate with Aurora. And as a part of our cooperation now, our embassy with Lakshman Kadika Mal Institute is planning to organise a seminar on disaster Preparedness and Japan's role in the IRA. On 10<sup>th</sup> October, just the day before the IRS ministerial meeting. So, I hope that would be a first step in formulating concrete cooperation between Japan and Sri Lanka as President of Iora. OK. Thank you very much.

**Ms. Aruni Wijewardane:**

Thank you, ambassador. We may come back to you later and next I have High Commissioner Gopal Bagley. Congratulations on a very successful G20 summit. We all watched with amazement. Enter High Commissioner. We recently had a successful working visit from His Excellency President to India. He met with Prime Minister Modi at his invitation and. It was quite a landmark visit because the visit ended with the vision document, which focused on the way forward, Economic Cooperation and connectivity with Sri Lanka. We also had, of course, last year prior to this visit, Minister of External Affairs Jaishankar visited Sri Lanka and. Foreign Minister subtly visited India this year in March to attend the Raisina dialogue. Again, had discussions with the External Affairs Minister of India. This year. Visit between the Summit meeting between His Excellency the President and Prime Minister Modi took place also significantly one year after the president assumed office and also in the 75th year anniversary year of our bilateral relations and at a forward-looking time because Sri Lanka was. Recovery also thanks to the significant assistance extended by India in solidarity with the situation we were in last year, we are looking forward to stabilisation and recovery in the future. So let me ask you how you see with this background both the bilateral movement and also the Indian Ocean related perspective of India and related to the Sagar Policy Neighbourhood First Policy. And all this. Thank you.

**H.E. Gopal Baglay:**

Your Excellency, the President's other dignitaries in the hall on this day with me. Friends, ladies and gentlemen, it's a great privilege to be speaking to all of you here, especially in the presence of the honourable President and the former speaker Karu Jayasooriya, both of whom he has been, have been pillars of support to India, Sri Lanka relationship in many ways. I would dwell briefly. I actually do not have much to supplement in terms of the bilateral visit and its outcome beyond what Honourable Chief of staff and you. Mentioned, but three aspects I would just like to point out. Of course, the most important outcome of the visit of the Honourable President is the connectivity document, and that sums up the visual connectivity. Is the keyword in all its dimensions. But if I could step back a little bit. As you mentioned last year, now the present moment and where do we? Go from here. I think the India, Sri Lanka bilateral relationship dynamics in a sense captures our vision and effort for cooperation for the entire Indian Ocean region and Indo Pacific. If you look at it. In terms of the support that you very kindly mentioned. Both of you. It is the. It is the. Scale and speed, which were quite unprecedented even for us. And in terms of? Going forward. The most important aspect right now is that as Sri Lanka comes out of a difficult situation it is on the path of economic recovery, stabilisation

and then growth. And next door, as I always say, the intervening waters between India and Sri Lanka do not divide us. They actually bind us just a few nautical miles away. India is, in a sense, a powerhouse of economic growth. So, this rapid growth and transformation of India is technological advancement. And Sri Lanka's own project. Towards a sustainable growth now coming into the future. It gives us an enormous opportunity to usher in prosperity not only for both the countries but for the region as a whole Indian Ocean region. And this is. This opportunity is very well supplemented by the unparalleled advantages that this relationship has. These advantages are not only of geographical proximity, but they are the advantages of civilizational ties, cultural connect and mutual goodwill between the people of the two countries. I mentioned that this in a sense captures the effort of our cooperation for the Indian Ocean region. I would elaborate this point a little if you are publicly. If we look historically, the Indian Ocean region as a whole has been the highway of Interlinkages spanning. Multitude of geographies. It has been a vibrant economic zone, but also a community founded on culture and history. So, in a sense, it is just not a geographical region, it is a zone of historical economic connectivity. And close historical and civilizational linkages. The current effort of India and its leadership is essentially to rediscover the role of the region, to work with other like minded partners in rediscovering this historical role of the Indian Ocean region as the whole of Asia and Asia Pacific. Powers the economic growth and prosperity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Indian Ocean. As far as India is concerned, there are two fundamental aspects 1. Is that historically true? India has been the centre. The epicentre of these economic interlinkages and historical civilizational connectivity, so we would like to be a facilitator in this region, facilitator of INTERLINKAGES. The second aspect, which would be very well familiar to this distinguished audience, is the doctrine of Sagar Security and growth for all in the region. Propounded by the Prime Minister of India in 2015, many of you would know, so pardon me for when I repeated it, but it is essentially having a few elements out of which I would like. To mention three or. Four, the first is ensuring a safe, secure, and stable Indian Ocean. The second is promoting a more integrated and cooperative environment, the Economic Cooperation environment. That leads to sustainable development for all. The third. Which is a corollary to what I just said in the second one. Deeper security and Economic Cooperation with our neighbours to begin with, and that is where the neighbourhood first policy comes in. Deeper economic and security cooperation with our neighbours. In a way that their own capacities are also enhanced and we can contribute where we can according to the requirements. Of our neighbours. And the fourth point is taking responsibility in this region for our shared security. I would say that you know the days were. Others would set the security agenda in this region



behind us. Our security is our responsibility and therefore our shared cooperation in this regard is extremely important. By ourselves, by India itself, we are prepared to take responsibility in this regard, to be the net security provider provided in the region to be the first responder. Also, in the case of HDR situations, emergency situations. But we know that this is not something we can do in our own countries of the region. The literal states of the Indian Ocean region and I must compliment and congratulate Sri Lanka for the chair ship of Iora this year and we look forward to the events further down. Maybe some of them are just about a month away now. That is a very important occasion on which she encouraged the chair of the IRA, we are very privileged, and we are very happy to work with Sri Lanka for promoting the objectives of the IRA. So, in the context of security, it is our shared responsibility. Wish to create incorporation with all others. An Indian Ocean region where the focus is not on conflict but on cooperation. As my Japanese colleague also mentioned, the focus is on development and not on division or domination. So, if I could summarise in one word again. I go back to the same world connection. Which is bilaterally also in the visit of the President summarises our effort for the future. Our vision for the future and that is why I said what India is doing in its bilateral relationship with Sri Lanka in a sense captures our vision and the centrality, the central thrust of our effort for the entire. Indian Ocean region. This is most important. We are promoting multimodal transports. We are trying to build international connectivity, our own. Together with that, we are improving our own railways, our own coastal shipping, our own ports, infrastructure and now you mentioned G20. Thank you very much for your kind words. Could not have been what it was without the cooperation of everyone involved. But one particular tour I would like to point out which happened during the G21, is the launch of the Global Alliance for Biofuels, and I would again like to thank Sri Lanka for your consent to join this alliance as a founder. But I think equally important, if not more, is to make the India, Middle East Europe connectivity corridor that will be. A game changer? That will be a game changer, not only for us in India but also, I think for our neighbours with which we share the vision of prosperity and. Coming together to work for that shared future. Thank you very much.

**Ms. Aruni Wijewardane:**

Let me now move on to Ambassador Jean-François Pactet. Bonjour and welcome back. So, we had an excellent meeting. At the airport in July, with His Excellency the President and President

Macron, and want to highlight a tweet message, Twitter message that President Macron released soon after his visit. Which is very interesting, he said. Sri Lanka and France are two Indian Ocean nations that share the same goal and open, inclusive, and prosperous Indo Pacific. In Colombo, we confirmed it strengthened by 75 years of diplomatic relations. We can open a new era of our partnerships. Maybe you can explain France as an Indian Ocean nation and also. Let me also highlight the high-level exchanges we had this year. Actually, we did not have one for very many years. We did not have the kind of high level contact we should have had with France. Foreign Minister Sabri met with the French foreign minister recently and also, I had discussions with my counterpart in the French Foreign Ministry. That was the first time we were foreign. With our discussions, which was really very fascinating and that set the stage actually for quite a significant meeting in Colombo between the two Heads of State and quite concrete follow-up actions which are bound to be extremely beneficial for both our countries. Going into the future, so may I hear from you?

**H.E. Jean-François Pactet:**

Thank you very much your Excellency President, Madam Secretary, and the colleagues. I am grateful for the opportunity to reflect a bit on the visit of President Macron here in Colombo. And I am happy you mentioned the tweet, which he. Made and this mentioned France as an Indian Ocean country, because I also said the same thing. It is always good for an ambassador to say the same thing as your President. And actually, I sometimes get a bit of surprise from people saying French and Indian Ocean countries. We thought France was in Europe and of course, France is in Europe, but France is also and I think that was an important part of the meeting, a country with. By Tories in the Indian Ocean and I am not going to bore you with numbers but let me give you just one France. Just like all maritime countries, it has an exclusive economic zone in the sea. Know what part of France's exclusive economic zone is in the Indian shell? It is 30%. Three .3030% of the French exclusive economic zone is indeed the Indian Ocean. So, we have States and actually we are the only European country. The country to be present and to have this kind of stakes. So that means we also have specific issues related to the Indian Ocean. The funds trafficking sustainable development, many political issues and that is actually this situation and the fact that France is also a country which takes in the Indian Ocean is the basis for our goal for an open, inclusive and prosper Indian. So that was one of the key parts for us of the visit, I think and the. Assessment that we have common stakes which

belong to cars and then that increasing cooperation with Canon cars is in our common interest and that was one of the takeaways I think and one of the elements of the visit of President Macron. If I may, I think one of the key parts of the visit of President Macron. Was to recognise the commitment of Sri Lanka on global issues such as climate change. Sri Lanka is currently in a difficult economic situation and despite this situation, Sri Lanka has shown great leadership on green economy, on sustainable development, with high ambitious targets about green energy. With the proposals in the University on climate change. And This is why we were happy to hear Sri Lanka in Paris and the Sri Lanka voice in Paris. So, the President in the Paris Summit for a new Global Financing Act because I think many countries want to hear about this situation and want to hear about this determination and this. Commitment on global issues and the ways and work together on finding the ways to address the economic situation and to make to continue this commitment and about sustainable development. And maybe I do not want to. Be too long and I. Think one of the maybe the third key part of our this of the visit of our President was also to express our commitment to stand alongside in this economic situation, France. Is the force bilateral creditor of Sri Lanka and the French Development Agency again, just to give one number as a project totalling €375,000,000 in Sri Lanka, so the French President Express and this was important for us. Our commitment for rapid, inclusive, transparent, and fair restructuring of the debt and this is something we are working hard on and on which we hope to achieve results very, very soon. So, the visit was in line with this global increase in the relation between. France and Spain on car and it confirmed many converging views and interest in intensifying the cooperation you mentioned the previous. This is in line with the previous meetings and the meetings which took place at the level of the Foreign Ministers. And we are going to continue and I think we both countries are determined to continue in that direction. But these elements I think are the key points we take from this meeting of the Presidents, which was a really very fruitful meeting from our point of view. Thank you.

**Ms. Aruni Wijewardane:**

Thank you, ambassador. Interesting point about 35% you said of your exclusive economy, 30% is in the notion that is a staggering statistic. Thank you. And then may I come to Ambassador

Qi Zhenhong, Ambassador of China, we are on the sort of very close to a visit to China by His Excellency the President in October, he will be. Visiting for the third belt and Road Forum for international cooperation commemorating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this initiative, and at that during that visit summit level meeting also will take place. We also had discussions with my counterpart from the Foreign Ministry of China, Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong, who visited Sri Lanka in May this year, and we had the 30th Sri Lanka, China diplomatic consultations. May we hear from you, Ambassador, something further about this very strong Cooperation and strong friendly relations between China and Sri Lanka. Also, during the last year there have been a number of visits. I know at the level of parliamentarians and business delegations and so forth, and also about China's interest in the Indian Ocean. Also, through its Belt and Road initiative and also your global development initiative which is very closely linked. Thank you, ambassador.

**H.E. Qi Zhenhong:**

Thank you. His excellency and distinguished guests. First, thank you geopolitical cartographer. How to grab for inviting me to attend the conference to share your insights? I would like to highlight that after COVID-19 pandemic, China has been the country with the closest to high level exchanges with Sri Lanka. Just as you mentioned last month, his honourable Prime Minister and speaker. Visit China respectfully. The next month, the president has running will attended the third about the road Forum for international Cooperation. This is historical. Event in the development of bilateral relations between our two countries. Government and people attach great importance to this visit. So designs the high level, the bilateral exchanges, many Minister with China, and China Minister, also with the Sri Lanka. Yeah. So, it is very the relation is very tired. And China is also the largest foreign investment and the fastest growing number of the tourists to Sri Lanka. So please allow me to make some important addition to the regional level exchanges between the two countries. The first point I want to say. II Ocean regions, as we all know, Indian Ocean is a second largest ocean in the world. Sri Lanka have a unique your location in the region and play important role in the regional affairs. But I want to emphasise that the vast majority of the Indian Ocean region are developing countries and face the same development goals task as China. However, changes of the world of our times of history. Unfolding right now in ways that like never before. Which leads to rapidly growing uncertainty in stability and. Private, private, practical ability. So, we should. Yes, we should make this is, you know, and is it background that the region in your region is e-mail is e-mail so I think. All the countries, all the country, regardless of size or location. Should take a broader

view and do more. Think about the future of humanity while pursue. Once the old interest. So, in one word, we must choose solidarity over. Over division, cooperation over confrontation and inclusiveness over exclusion. Only by doing so. Can we maintain Indian Ocean peace, stability and prosperous? The second point is for is for the regional that that, that that issues that issues. I think the trip was that the Sri Lanka and the region is facing today is not so cold the death trap. But the net development trend? And I fully with his agency present running around us that what a Sri Lanka needs is not only that this structuring. At this moment, but more importantly. The economy is struggling in the future. The Third Point I want to point out is that the bilateral relations. China is always a reliable strategic partner and appreciates that Sri Lanka has always been friendly to China and has stood by China on issues related to China's core interests. And China also formed its support Sri Lanka in safeguarding his sovereignty, independence, and national dignity, and is willing to strengthen the exchanges of experience in governance as well as cooperation in various fields. In terms of the daily treatment, I always told with a friend told with our friends China. In that house now for his surrender. Friend Tom. Yeah. In the in the history country in the future, we never. Let our slang our friends down. So, we are to believe that his Lanka friends will overcome his temporary difficulty. And support the Selangor friends to find the development path in nine ways, his national conditions and realising revitalization and prosperity. We also will, will join hands with. Friends to accelerate his industrialization process and agriculture modernization. Thank you.

**Ms. Aruni Wijewardane:**

Thank you, Excellency. Turn to the development dimension of Chinas Indian Ocean engagement and policy as well. Thank you very much to all the Excellencies on this stage. As I said, all of you are very strong partners of Sri Lanka in in where we are right now and where we plan to be. Both on our economic front as well as on bilaterally, how we plan to move forward. 1/3 aspect, of course is the Indian Ocean dimension. As you all know, Sri Lanka will be taking over the chairmanship of the Indian Ocean Rim Association in October. That will be on the 10th of October and we look forward to the participation. High level participation from all your countries and this will also give us a forum in which to collectively take forward all the priorities that your countries have now expressed regarding. Bilateral and other relations related to the ocean and we look forward to a successful meeting in October. Thank you for spending this last one hour with us. Would you like to say any final words? OK. Thank you very much and thank you also to the audience. Your Excellency. President, thank you for being with us.

**Mr. Rishan de Silva:**

With that, I would like to thank our panellists for their insightful and informative contributions.  
And we would like to present them with a token of appreciation.

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