

**Speech by Ambassador SUGIYAMA on the occasion of
Pathfinder Foundation Indian Ocean Security Conference (Inaugural Session)
(12:15-13:25, November 10, 2020, Webinar)**

Admiral Professor Jayanath Colombage, Foreign Secretary,
H.E. Ambassador Shivshankar Menon, Co-Chair of PF-IOSC,
H.E. Ambassador Bernard Goonetilleke, Chairman of Pathfinder Foundation and Co-
Chair of PF-IOSC,
H.E. Alaina B. Teplitz, U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka and Maldives,
H.E. Ambassador Geetha De Silva, Secretary General-PF-IOSC,
Distinguished Panelists and Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon, Ayubowan, Wanakkam, Konnichiwa.

First of all, let me begin by expressing my heartfelt appreciation to the Pathfinder Foundation (PF) for organizing this conference most efficiently despite having had to face numerous challenges due to the prevailing pandemic of COVID-19. In this regard, I would like to commend the ablest team of the PF led by Mr. Milinda Moragoda, the Founder of the Foundation and Ambassador Bernard Goonetilleke, Chairman, as well as Ms. Ameerah Arooze, Director-Programmes, among other staff, for working tirelessly to bring us together on the common platform once again to discuss the pressing topics on the security of the Indian Ocean.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The meeting of the International Advisory Group (IAG), which was convened on March 18th last year, had aimed at hammering out the multifaceted issues impacting on the security of the Indian Ocean, and prepared ground for the current PF-IOSC. The meeting thus conducted under skillful chairmanship of Ambassador Shivshankar Menon has successfully distilled the differing views and ideas into three essential issues upon which the distinguished participants are going to discuss over the course of the next three days.

The IAG meeting identified; a) Maritime Security and Freedom of Navigation,

b)Enhancing Connectivity, and c)Addressing ‘Mistrust’ and ‘Trust Deficiency’ which resonate very closely with the three principles of the vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, that is, a)Strengthening the Rule of Law, especially Freedom of Navigation, b) Enhancing Connectivity through “Quality Infrastructure”, and c)Maintaining peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and beyond.

A Free and Open Indo-Pacific, whose acronym is FOIP that the Government of Japan envisages and promotes, is a vision that upholds the Indo-Pacific Oceans to be “Global Commons,” or “international public goods,” which would benefit all the countries, littoral and non-littoral alike, and is an inclusive concept open to all countries that share its basic principles. Such universal nature of FOIP, in my view, may have led the IAG to reach the basic affinity in its approach, which also reflects the common aspirations being long pursued in the history of the Indian Ocean - in the form of *mare liberum* or the free sea.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sri Lanka, located at the strategic position on the east-west sea lanes, is an important partner in realizing a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”. Our Foreign Minister MOTEGI Toshimitsu, during his visit to Sri Lanka last December, shortly after the inauguration of the new government under H.E. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, renewed Japan’s commitment to assisting Sri Lanka’s development as a hub in the Indian Ocean. The foundation of the present maritime cooperation between Sri Lanka and Japan, however, was laid back in 2014 when the then Prime Minister Abe paid an official visit to Sri Lanka. On that occasion, the then Prime Minister Abe and the then H.E. President Mahinda Rajapaksa issued a Joint Statement, which was appropriately titled “A New Partnership between Maritime Countries”. In this Joint Statement, the two leaders expressed their determination to elevate Japan-Sri Lanka relations, which have matured and diversified based on the long-standing friendship, into “a new partnership between maritime countries”; and to further strengthen the cooperative relations to play significant roles in the stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Ocean regions. Under the leadership of new Prime Minister SUGA Yoshihide, Japan continues to pursue a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, and I would like to add that, as Prime Minister SUGA stated during the recent maiden Prime Ministerial visit to Vietnam and Indonesia, ASEAN’s vision for the Indo-Pacific, that is, ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) shares many fundamental commonalities with the FOIP.

Based on the agreed framework, Japan and Sri Lanka have made steady progress in the area of maritime cooperation. On the maritime safety and security, to begin with, Japan has extended assistance to Sri Lanka by, a)granting two new patrol vessels to Sri Lanka Coast Guard, b)extending technical assistance for improving oil spill management to Sri Lanka Coast Guard, in view that Sri Lanka faces heavy traffic of oil tankers off the coast everyday, and c)supporting VBSS (Visit, Board, Search and Seizure) Training Courses conducted by Global Maritime Crime Programme of UNODC closely supported by Sri Lanka Navy, to tackle the mounting challenge of illegal drug trafficking plaguing the regions, among others. Recently, the same patrol vessels also played an active role in contributing to the joint effort carried out by Sri Lanka and India in successfully extinguishing the fire that broke out on a distressed oil tanker steering off the coast of Sri Lanka.

In addition, Japan has been strengthening exchanges between the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) and the Sri Lanka Navy through regular port calls by JMSDF, especially on their way to and from the Gulf of Aden to engage in the counter-piracy operations.

With regard to enhancing the connectivity and maintaining the peace and prosperity in the region, Japan has been promoting “Quality Infrastructure” development in accordance with international standards, with particular emphasis on a) open access, b) transparency, c) economic efficiency including life-cycle cost, and d) financial viability of recipient countries. Japan continues to engage in the development of quality infrastructure in Sri Lanka most diligently, with special focus on ports, airports, power supply, water supply, and irrigation, among others, to correspond to the needs of the Government and people of Sri Lanka.

Finally, the importance of Confidence-building cannot be over-emphasized for realizing the vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. The present conference of the Pathfinder Foundation will help create a conducive atmosphere for confidence-building among different stakeholders. As I stressed last year, Pathfinder Foundation’s initiative to hold this important conference has particular significance because of Sri Lanka’s unique geographical location, as I mentioned earlier, and the prominent role Sri Lanka has been playing in promoting the peace and prosperity of the region. I strongly hope that today’s conference will provide a valuable opportunity for close and constructive exchange of

views of prominent experts, which will lay a precious foundation for common understanding on the way forward.

On this note, I would like to express our great pleasure of being a partner of PF-IOSC, and once again, appreciate the Pathfinder Foundation for organizing this iconic conference.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

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