

Strengthening Cooperation

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The South and South East Asian Nations (SASEAN) Defence Chiefs' Dialogue, which is a pioneering initiative will be held for the first time in Sri Lanka. The objective of the Dialogue is to promote regional peace and stability through mutually beneficial dialogue and cooperation.

It is an endeavour, which will encourage countries to find solutions for common issues while providing a support mechanism for countries to peacefully absolve their disputes through constructive dialogue rather than creating instability or distrust. General Jagath Jayasuriya, Chief of Defence Staff spoke about the importance of this gathering of security chiefs in the region.

By Udeshi Amarasinghe and Krishani Peiris Photography Mahesh Bandara and Indika De Silva

The inaugural session of SASEAN Defence Chiefs' Dialogue organised by the Office of the Chief of Defence Staff in collaboration with the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development is poised as a catalyst in promoting security and stability when meeting the challenges of the Asian transformation and resurgence. The idea was first conceived after observing the timely need for forming relations among the countries in the SAARC as well as ASEAN regions that are connected by the Indian and Pacific Oceans as well as through common interests.

"I was in Indonesia in March at the Jakarta International Defence Dialogue as a guest speaker and I realised the level of organisation in the defence establishments in the ASEAN region, where they regularly had meetings at Defence Minister level," said General Jayasuriya. Following his return to Sri Lanka, General Jayasuriya discussed with Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa the importance of having such a forum, which will include Defence Chiefs in the SAARC and ASEAN regions. "Defence Secretary immediately gave me the directive to organise the first forum in Sri Lanka.

I believe it is pertinent that we form an affiliation at the defence level in order to achieve better cooperation. We can interact and get to know each other."

As such under the guidance of Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Secretary to the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development, the first ever Defence Chiefs' Dialogue in the SASEAN region is ready to be held with the participation of 20 countries-eight in the SAARC region, ten in the ASEAN region with China and Russia as 'observers'. The main objective of the forum is to 'promote regional peace and stability through

dialogue and cooperation in the spheres of defence and security challenges', which will ultimately result in the inception of a SASEAN Security Community (SSC). The forum is further expected to 'reinforce the vision of The Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measure in Asia (CICA), established in 1992. The CICA is acclaimed as having the largest membership among regional organisation in Asia engaged in promoting security and stability. However, this forum "will not a be a military organisation such as NATO," stressed General Jayasuriya.

"I Believe That Through Interaction And Getting To Know Others Better, The Understanding And Sharing That We Will Accomplish Are The Most Important Outcomes From This Forum"

"Professor G L Peiris, was very appreciative when informed about the initiative and he said it was a good but delayed one. Further he said understanding people and the issues in this region are vital and was very positive that the two regions would be cooperative in this venture," relayed General Jayasuriya.

Divided into several sessions over three days, the venues include The Kingsbury and Waters Edge, where the invited Chiefs of Defence Staff will deliberate on shared matters and other related subjects. The Defence Secretary will be the keynote speaker while a special session will be conducted by Prof G L Peiris, Minister of External Affairs on the significance of the forum as well as being united under one organisation and the way forward. The inauguration and closing ceremonies will have other invitees but all the sessions will be held behind closed doors.

"If possible we want to carry out this initiative annually. However I believe that some countries may have doubts on whether this is about allying forces taking action against others. I can assure everyone that this forum is held not with any such idea. Such action are political decisions and we will not engage in such discussions. Sri Lanka is a non aligned country. We have to remain non aligned and the majority of the participating countries also fall into that category. This will be a forum to interact and understand each other and to seek ways as to how best we can cooperate. That is the purpose of the SASEAN Defence Chief's Dialogue. It is a gathering of the highest officials in the defence establishments of the participating countries," affirmed General Jayasuriya.

The South And South East Asian Nations (SASEAN) Defence Chiefs' Dialogue Will Be Held In Colombo From November 27-29, 2014

The agenda, which will be broad and flexible will prompt the exchange of views on regional and extra regional security and defense issues, voluntary briefings on defence and security policies by each Chief of Defence related to their respective countries, discussion on related activities outside the Asian region, interaction with external partners, promoting SASEAN defence cooperation and networking among the participants. Among the discussions taking place, attention will be paid to comprehend the different defence systems in place in each country and the responsibilities that fall into the administration influencing the defence of that country. As such each Chief of Defence will be encouraged to address the gathering on a voluntary basis detailing the defence system in place in their respective country while others will provide suggestions, paving the way for a constructive dialogue to all participants. This would create an ideal opportunity for the participants to voice out their opinions as well as concerns to reach mutually favourable conclusions. Attention will also be paid to issues related to maritime operations and trade such as threats faced in the region and more. The second day will be devoted to discourses focusing on the region and what threats and security issues may present a risk to the SASEAN region in general. Emphasis will also be put to analysing what affects security, both at a regional and global level.

“At the end of the deliberations we will strive to reach an agreement that will be conveyed through the form of a declaration,” remarked the General. “However the content of the declaration will depend on the discussions, ideas presented, and the unanimous agreement of the participants. Also we are hoping to form and adopt a secretariat and mandate for functioning during the intervening period at the inaugural and subsequent meetings.”

The Dialogue or the forum will be guided by The Declaration of Principles Guiding Relations between CICA member countries. It is anticipated that Defence Chiefs representing SASEAN states will play a lead role in the forum which will in due course become an integral part of the CICA adding value and complementing the overall process of the organisation.

“This is the first time that such a forum is taking place in Sri Lanka as well as in SASEAN. The Deputy Defence Minister of Russia will be attending as well the Chief

of Defence Staff or equivalent, from the respective countries,” said the General.

“As Defence Chief I am aware, that military-wise, our way of working is different. The military is straight forward and our outlook is different from most others as well. So it is imperative to cultivate friendships among other countries as one would be able to achieve tasks much faster. Therefore I believe that through interaction and getting to know others better, the understanding and sharing that we will accomplish are the most important outcomes from this forum,” concluded General Jagath Jayasuriya.



DEFENCE CHIEFS' DIALOGUE 2014

Organised by the Office of the Chief of Defence Staff - Ministry of Defence Sri Lanka

