

**COMMANDER OF THE NAVY'S WELCOME SPEECH AT THE HANDING OVER/TAKING
OVER CEREMONY OF SLNS SAGARA AT COLOMBO HARBOUR ON 27TH AUGUST 2015**

His Excellency Mr. YK Sinha the Indian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka, Secretary Ministry of Defence Mr. BMUD Basnayake, Chief of Defence Staff, Commander of the Army, Commander of the Air Force, Mr. S. Hettiarachchi, the Additional Secretary Ministry of Defence, Major General Rakesh Bhaduria from the National Defence College, New Delhi, my course mate in the 50th Indian National Defence College course. Deputy High Commissioner to the Indian High Commission in Colombo, Our former Commander Admiral Jayantha Perera, senior officers, officials from the Indian High Commission, ladies and gentlemen.

It is with great pride and honour that I am standing today here to take over the ship SLNS Sagara. Before I proceed further Your Excellency, I think that we should focus our RADAR towards the Indo-Lanka maritime relationship which we had from time immemorial.

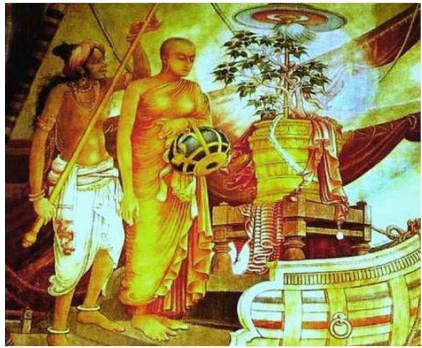
As per the chronological written history of Sri Lanka the “Mahawansa”, there had been a Kingdom called “Singha Pura” in Orissa, and there was a prince called “Vijaya” who was a troublesome Prince. His father banished Prince Vijaya from his kingdom and asked him to build seven ships and take his 700 followers and to leave the kingdom and start a new settlement somewhere.



So he came and landed in Sri Lanka. As per the “Mahawansa”, this is the start of the Sinhala race. Your Excellency, if you visit the “Ajantha” caves in “Maharashtra Pradesh” please visit cave number 17. The walls of the cave number 17 shows the “Vijayawatharanaya” or Vijaya’s amphibious landing in Sri Lanka.

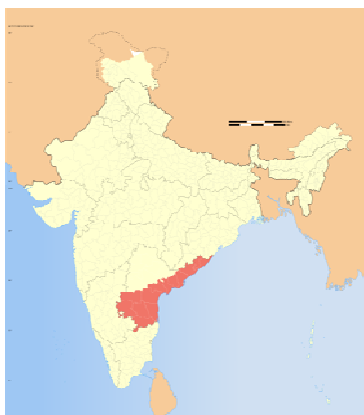
***Section of the mural in Cave 17, the 'coming of Sinhala'.
The prince (Prince Vijaya) is seen in both groups of elephants and riders.***

After almost four centuries since arrival of Prince Vijaya, Buddhism came to Sri Lanka. The Great Indian Emperor “Ashoka” sent his own son “Arahath Mahinda Banthe” to carry Lord Buddha’s message to Sri Lanka.

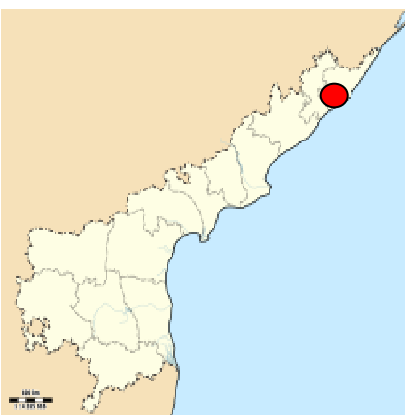


Terani Sangamitta's arrival by sea

Even though we do not have much historic details of how “Arahath Mahinda” came to Sri Lanka, we have a very nicely written history of how the Sri Maha Bodhi or the sapling of the “Bo Tree” under which lord Buddha attained enlightenment was taken from Your Excellency’s ancestral town in “Bhodgaya” through the land up to the ancient harbour in “Thotlakonda”, a place about 07 kilometers North of today’s biggest naval harbour in India the “Vishakapatnam” and then sailed up to “Madagal” about 07 kilometers North of Jaffna.



Andhra Pradesh



Thotlakonda



Maha Stupa at Thotlakonda

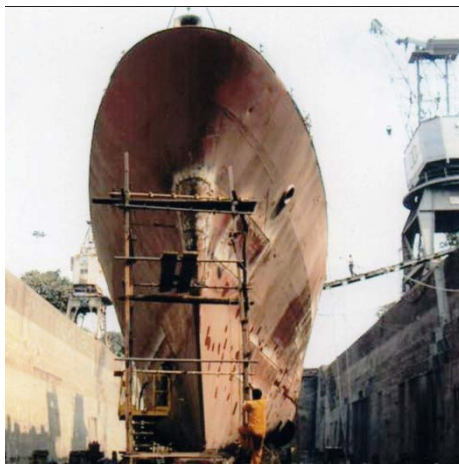
So that’s why Your Excellency I say, that Sri Lanka is a maritime nation and maritime affairs are there in our DNA.

In the recent history, almost 70% of my officers and most of the sailors were trained with the Indian Navy. And, what that we have with the in Indian Navy is similar to the relationship what we have as students, with teachers.

If we have done well fighting for the last three decades in bringing peace to our country, that professionalism came because of the strong foundations that our officers and men acquired from the Indian Naval Training institutions.

So Excellency, if I say in “Sanskrit”, the “Guru Shiksha” relationship is above all the relationships that we have.

Your Excellency, if I talk about SLNS “Sagara”, this ship was given to us by the Indian Coast Guard on free dry lease agreement in year 2006. She was earlier known as the Indian Coast Guard ship Varaha. This ship has taken part in the most important historic naval expedition that our country ever had. That is to sail thousand miles from our coast and to sink 10 LTTE gun carrying ships or floating warehouses in the international waters of the Indian Ocean, almost 1300 nautical miles away from our coast in year 2007. So, when we went to launch that deep sea Naval Operation, it was “Sagara” and “Sayura”, another ship which was given from India were the flag ships.



SLNS Sagara during her medium refit at the Garden Reach Dockyard, Kolkata

Then in year 2009 this ship went to the Garden Reach Dockyard in Kolkata. There she underwent a medium refit and the engines were overhauled with no cost to the Sri Lankan government.

Now she is back and from year 2010 we were running it like our own ship. Today, we are delighted as she was given to us with no cost to the Sri Lankan Government. ***Your Excellency, this is going to be the single most expensive Naval asset that any country has given free to the Sri Lanka Navy during the last 64 years of the Navy's history. This Ship today will worth almost 35 million USD.***

So we are proud and we are always grateful personally to Your Excellency, to the Indian Navy, the Indian Coast Guard and also to the Indian Government and its people for giving this ship to the Sri Lanka Navy. And I'm sure that our bond which came from time immemorial will continue for the next generations.

Thank you very much.



SLNS Sagara at the Colombo Port