

The "Indian Ocean: Defining our Future" Conference, which aims to create a platform for Indian Ocean littoral states and major maritime users to discuss issues of mutual interest and concern, will be held in Colombo on 11-12 October 2018.

This Conference is held at a time when the Indian Ocean has emerged as one of the world's busiest and most critical trade corridors, carrying two thirds of global oil shipments and a third of bulk cargo and hosting the most critical Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs), directly impacting global trade and economy.

The "Indian Ocean: Defining Our Future" Conference will explore the region's strongest challenges and opportunities in a 2-day symposium featuring international dignitaries and experts from the littoral states and beyond. Sri Lanka's geographical location in the Indian Ocean and its long history of peaceful engagement with the international community makes it an ideal convenor of such an international Conference.

The Conference, scheduled to be held at Temple Trees, is an initiative of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe with the patronage of President Maithripala Sirisena.

The inaugural address of the Conference will be delivered by President Maithripala Sirisena while Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe will deliver the keynote address. The UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, Ambassador Peter Thomson will also address the inaugural session.

The Inaugural Panel titled "Navigating Challenges and Prospects in the Indian Ocean: Towards a Shared Understanding" will include key policy makers such as Indian Deputy National Security Advisor Pankaj Saran, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the US State Department Alice G. Wells, and Director General of the Department of Boundary and Ocean Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China Yi Xianliang, and Deputy Director General at Department of International Relations and Cooperation, South Africa, and Chair of the Committee of Senior Officials of IORA, Dr Anil Sooklal.

The speakers and participants will focus their discussions on four thematic areas, namely: The

Indian Ocean Economy: The New Global Growth Pole; Life below Water: Reframing the Oceans as Development Spaces; An End to Uncertainty: Safety and Security at Sea; and Reinforcing International Law in the Indian Ocean: United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and Emerging Issues.

The Conference is expected to lead to a multilateral diplomatic Conference to be held early next year in Sri Lanka building on the work of this Conference and move towards an understanding among littoral states and major maritime users that would contribute towards greater peace, security and prosperity in the Indian Ocean.

It is envisioned that events of this nature would further augment the government's policy towards transforming Sri Lanka into a regional trading, logistics and financial hub.

The Conference, which is a Track 1.5 exercise that includes policy makers and senior government officials along with academia, is organised by the Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute in collaboration with the Global Maritime Crime Programme of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

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