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வெளிநாட்டு அலுவல்கள் அமைச்சு
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Media Release

Sri Lanka assumes the Chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) at the 23rd Council of Ministers in Colombo

Sri Lanka assumed the chairmanship of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) at the 23rd IORA Council of Ministers which concluded in Colombo on 11 October 2023. Foreign Minister Ali Sabry chaired the meeting. Sri Lanka is a founding member of IORA which was established in 1997, and previously served as its Chair from 2003 to 2004. The 23rd IORA Council of Ministers was inaugurated with a colourful opening ceremony that brought the Indian Ocean into the conference room via virtual reality.

The Council of Ministers is the highest decision-making body of IORA and the Ministers are guided by the Senior Officials who meet as a Committee of Senior Officials, prior to the Council of Ministers. Accordingly, the 23rd IORA Council of Ministers was preceded by the 25th Committee of Senior Officials held on 09-10 October 2023, chaired by Foreign Secretary Aruni Wijewardane, who reported on the deliberations and work carried out by the Senior Officials during their two day meeting to the Council of Ministers.

It is significant that the two IORA meetings in Colombo saw the participation of all 23 Member States and the 11 Dialogue Partners. This included the Foreign Ministers of Bangladesh, India, Mauritius, Malaysia and South Africa and the Minister for Blue Economy of Tanzania as well as Ministerial and senior level participation from Australia, Comoros, France, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Maldives, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Yemen (member countries) and from China, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Germany, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Türkiye, United Kingdom and United States of America (dialogue partners).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which is the newest Dialogue Partner of the IORA attended the IORA meetings for the first time at the IORA meetings in Colombo.

Welcoming the Ministers and representatives of the Member States and Dialogue Partners who have gathered in Colombo, Foreign Minister Ali Sabry said their presence was testament to the spirit of collaboration and cooperation that defines the region, and that Sri Lanka appreciated their commitment to strengthen the ties that bind the Indian Ocean community. He said that in the great tradition of hospitality, Sri Lanka opens its doors and its heart to all of its guests.

Minister Sabry added that the progress & recovery Sri Lanka has made would not have been possible without the unwavering support and cooperation of its friends in the region and beyond, as well as the resilience of the Sri Lankans.

Referring to the important role Sri Lanka has played in international affairs, Minister Sabry recalled that Sri Lanka was a part of the Bandung Conference which paved the way for the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement, which Sri Lanka led in 1976. Sri Lanka's foreign policy has centred on peace, stability, diversity, and inclusivity both in the region, and beyond.

Minister Sabry also recalled the indelible mark Sri Lanka made on the world stage in the introduction and the passage of the historic resolution at the United Nations to declare the Indian Ocean region and its airspace as a Zone of Peace in 1971 which sought to transform the Indian Ocean into a symbol of cooperation, understanding, and tranquillity, transcending political boundaries and ideologies. He reiterated the unwavering faith Sri Lanka has placed on multilateralism and diplomacy as a means for the international community to work towards resolving a variety of recurrent challenges.

The Ministers discussed the ways to cooperate on the six priority areas identified by the Association, including Trade and Investment, Maritime Safety and Security, Fisheries Management, Disaster Risk Management, Women's Empowerment and Blue Economy, among others.

The Ministers adopted the Colombo Communiqué at the conclusion of their Meeting as the outcome document. In the Communiqué, the Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to the IORA goals and objectives enshrined in the Charter and pledged their support to Sri Lanka as the Chair of IORA to lead a vibrant and purpose-driven Association which fulfils its mandate to benefit all Member States and their peoples under the theme "Strengthening Regional Architecture: Reinforcing Indian Ocean Identity". The Ministers also acknowledged with appreciation the offer of the Government of Sri Lanka to host a Leaders' Summit of IORA in Colombo in 2024 to reflect on the Way Forward for the Indian Ocean Rim Association towards and beyond 2030.

The visiting Ministers made a collective call on President Ranil Wickremesinghe and held bilateral discussions with Foreign Minister Ali Sabry during their stay in Sri Lanka.

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