

## 5th Indian Ocean Conference concludes with extensive discussion on Ecology, Economy and Epidemic

With calls on the Indian Ocean countries to strengthen and expand regional and global cooperation to promote green development, work together to leverage the 4th Industrial Revolution, to maximum benefit so as to create a new and resilient growth pillar and promote the normalisation of trade, business **and** investment flows in the post-pandemic socio-economic development, 5th Indian Ocean conference concluded in Abu Dhabi.

Indian Ocean Region is home to major strategic sea routes connecting the Middle East, Africa and East Asia with Europe and the Americas. These vital sea routes facilitate maritime trade and carry more than half of the world's seaborne oil while hosting 23 of the world's top 100 container ports. This makes the region strategically unique.

With a special plenary session by Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Singapore and Ranil Wickremesinghe, former Prime Minister of Sri Lanka and current Member of the Parliament of Sri Lanka the second day of the conference started.

***Here are the key takeaways from the special Plenary Session:***

### **Vivian Balakrishnan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Singapore**

“The Indian Ocean has been an essential conduit for trade culture religion language and your strategic influence over the past five to six centuries and thus the theme for today Ecology Economy and the Epidemic is very salient”. Minister Balakrishnan said.

He shared concerns on the acceleration of many pre-existing trends aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic which includes nativism, nationalism and anti-globalization.

He added, “the virus in a very real way transcends borders race language religion and even today as we deal with the emergence of the new variant, it perfectly illustrates at this point, no one is safe until everyone is safe and we have to contribute to the collective fight against COVID-19 wherever and however we can”.

He also highlighted the Singapore Green Plan 2030 which is a whole nation roadmap to achieve the sustainable development goals and countries own net-zero aspiration.

Singapore Foreign Minister also spoke about the country's aim to quadruple solar energy production by 2025 to decarbonize the energy grids through electricity imports and to

phase out internal combustion engine vehicles by 2040, while actively investing in low-carbon solutions.

Turning to the economy he said, “The trajectory of COVID-19 is still uncertain, and the effects of waning immunity, or the ongoing evolving mutations such as the recent Omicron variant, remain to be seen”.

“Meanwhile, global supply chain disruptions, coupled with a pick-up in demand and rising energy prices could spur inflation. The economic stimuli and the government support have provided much-needed short term relief but will also have long term implications on governments’ sovereign debt”. He added.

Dr Vivian Balakrishnan [@VivianBala](#), Foreign Minister, Singapore, delivered his address in the Special Plenary Session at the 5th Indian Ocean Conference 2021 organised by India Foundation. [#IOC2021#IndianOceanConference](#)

Video Link: <https://t.co/X8oubuwMMk> [pic.twitter.com/8L0n5mSaZb](https://pic.twitter.com/8L0n5mSaZb)

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## **Ranil Wickremesinghe, former Prime Minister of Sri Lanka**

Former Sri Lankan Prime Minister started his address by highlighting an unprecedented paradigm shift that is taking place in the Indian Ocean. He said, “the dynamics and intersections of ecology the economy and the COVID-19 epidemic have surfaced new transnational security challenges to the Indian ocean region amidst intensifying geopolitical competitions”.

“As a result, regional economies will undergo fundamental structural changes having a far-reaching impact on the future of this region”, he added.

Speaking on climate change he shared concerns about the Maldives and rising sea level. Being caught at the intersection where the economy and ecology comes together, he spoke about the substantial requirement of coal by the countries focal to economic growth in the region, i.e. India, Bangladesh and Indonesia and highlighted how the utilization of coal beyond 2050 will accelerate global warming.

He said, “a post-COVID 19 global economic turnaround will be determined by the time frame of the vaccine rollout”.

“Not only in advanced countries but in all countries the arrangements to supply vaccines have been wrecked by the advanced economies captured in the vaccine market and stockpiling vaccine”, he added.

Minister Wickremesinghe also shared his concerns on the militarization of the Indian Ocean and called on countries to prevent an armed race in the region, instead, he suggested diverting those funds in the greater good, i.e. fighting climate change.

**Watch full video of the Special Plenary session:**

## **Plenary Session 1**

### **GL Piers, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sri Lanka**

Sri Lankan foreign minister speaking about the impact of the pandemic in the island nation said, “tourism is one of our main sources of foreign exchange and worth approximately 4.2 billion dollars a year. During the period of the pandemic, Sri Lanka lost almost all our major sources of foreign exchange to resemble one.”

He stressed that there’s a need to admit reasonable numbers of tourists into the country under controlled conditions.

He concluded his address on a note that “the remedy lies in fully exploiting the collective strength of the countries around the Indian Ocean.”

Mr G. L. Peiris, Foreign Minister, Sri Lanka, is speaking in Plenary Session at 5th Indian Ocean Conference 2021 organised by India Foundation in Abu Dhabi, UAE [#IOC2021#IndianOceanConference @MFA\\_SriLanka](#)

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## **Dhoiher Dhoulkamal, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Comoros**

Foreign Minister Dhoulkamal spoke about Comoros being aligned with all the development policies of the potential blue economy in line with the various regional and international policies and strategies.

The minister then emphasizes why a focus on the blue economy is essential in all the countries. As the economies are highly dependent on the oceans since 70 percent of economic exchanges are carried out by the sea.

He called on a better exploitation, responsible and reasoned management of fisheries resources and preservation of maritime ecosystems.

He also drew attention to the rise of ill-intentioned groups in the region and the need for logistical and financial means to protect the waters. Speaking about better maritime security he says there must be a central element with an emphasis on the fight against maritime piracy, oil spills, over-fishing, various traffic on the high seas and the protection of submarine cables.

## **Leon Jean Richard Rakotonirina, Defence Minister, Madagascar**

Madagascar Defence Minister highlighted the security challenges in the island nation and spoke about transnational hybrid threats in the regional security which requires cooperation in the different maritime security schedules and aspects.

He also shared concerns about ensuring an open and stable ocean, citing the recent closure of the Suez Canal and its impact on the global as well as regional supply lines.

Speaking about the impact of COVID-19 he said, “the COVID crisis impacts maritime logistics and transports, which further impacts the economy of island states”

He called on the IOR countries to work together through oceanographic research and sharing knowledge of the maritime domain to reduce ecological risks.

## **Tandi Dorji, Foreign Minister Bhutan**

Addressing the conference through a video call, Foreign Minister of Bhutan Tandi Dorji, said, “Physical environment is facing an existential crisis. Due to climate change, sea levels are rising, there are water shortages, increased fire threats and infectious diseases. Annual

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temperature records are witnessed around. Climate change as we all know is a global challenge that threatens the economic and social stability of our nations.”

He continued about Bhutan being nestled in the Himalayas and far away from the Indian ocean but still Bhutan facing as much risk from climate change and global warming as the UAE and other low-lying countries.

He added, “A country which is carbon negative and whose constitution mandates that 60 percent of forest protection at all times has not been spared the brunt of climate change the melting glaciers in the Himalayas”.

H.E. Mr Tandi Dorji, Foreign Minister of Bhutan, delivered his address at the 5th Indian Ocean Conference 2021. [#IOC2021](#) [#IndianOceanConference](#) [@FMBhutan@Indiainbhutan](#)

Video Link: <https://t.co/vjNhXzALAQ> [pic.twitter.com/ohw144DL5o](https://pic.twitter.com/ohw144DL5o)

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Bhutan is vulnerable to constant threats of climate-sensitive sectors such as hydropower and agriculture which are the country’s mainstay, he added.

He also shared his concerns about the glacier lake outburst and floods that could unleash at any moment and bring a room to entire river basins further downstream in the Indian plains and deltas resulting in millions of people bearing the brunt of the catastrophe.

**Watch full video:**

## Plenary Session 2

### Shariar Alam, State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh

Bangladesh Minister of Foreign Affairs spoke about the paramount significance for regional security connectivity peace and prosperity.

He said, “the geographical location and geomorphological conditions of the Indian Ocean

region have made the region one of the most vulnerable ones, it constitutes the lifeline of our globalized world providing a very vital sea lens of communication and feeds Asia's largest economies."

He added, "around 80 of the world trade world's Seabourn oil trade passes through the choke points of Indian Ocean. It literally connects the east to the west therefore Indian Ocean Conference has built up a very important platform to discuss and pursue shared interests of the region".

Speaking about the theme he said, "this year's theme, in particular, Indian Ocean: Ecology, Economy and Epidemic is a very pertinent one though very wide to focus on the needs of collective efforts to fight all the challenges of present and future". The confidence that this conference should give the world community a wake-up call for a unified voice in the coming days, he added.

### **Ouch Borith, Minister to the PM and Standing Sec of State, Cambodia**

Minister Borith reiterated Cambodia's strong commitment to the promotion of the mutual affinities between Indian Ocean Countries and ASEAN, especially as Cambodia undertakes the important role of ASEAN chair commencing January 2022.

Minister Borith also called on the countries to advance the blue economy through sustainable management and utilisation of ocean resources, pointing to a need for enhanced global and regional cooperation to harness these resources in a sustainable manner.

He called on countries to act together to build harmony, peace, sustainability, and prosperity for the whole region.

Mr Ouch Borith, Minister to the Prime Minister and Standing Secretary of State, Cambodia, delivered his address in the Plenary Session at the 5th Indian Ocean Conference 2021 organised by India Foundation in Abu Dhabi, UAE. [#IOC2021](#)  
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## **Omary Kipanga, Deputy Minister, Tanzania**

Tanzania Deputy Minister spoke about the disruption caused by COVID-19 which transformed human activities and behaviour in different ways. He emphasised how all countries including Tanzania have been impacted and continue to be impacted by the pandemic.

He highlighted the sectors most affected as maritime transport, tourism and the travel industry which also means the fisheries sector and the other sectors closely linked to tourism.

He said, “the cascading effect of the pandemic is beyond one imagination beyond all over the world have been affected in Tanzania. Most of the people survive on daily wages. And we as a nation can’t afford to lockdown our economy and we must live with it.”

He also emphasized Tanzania’s decision to implement a strict COVID management protocol. From spreading awareness among the people, observing social distancing norms, cleanliness, vaccination to contact the tracing of suspected cases to isolation.

**Watch full video:**

## **Plenary Session 3**

### **Honda Taro, Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Japan**

Japanese Vice-Foreign Minister in a prerecorded message said, “the COVID-19 pandemic has been driving the international community into a historic transformation and the theme and timing of the Indian Ocean conference is befitting”.

He also said this is the best and important reason for realizing a free and open indo-pacific.

He further added, “Japan has been advancing concrete cooperation in the Indian Ocean region and has provided assistance to port development projects in East African countries and conducted counter-piracy activities in the Gulf of Aden.” He added, “Japan is also promoting cooperation with the countries of the Indian Ocean Rim including in the areas of ecology economy and epidemic which are the main themes of this conference”.

Speaking more about trade in the post-pandemic era he said, “we have been leading the way

to make high standard economic rules to realize a free, open, fair, inclusive, non-discriminatory, transparent, predictable and stable trade and investment environment and to ensure the free global movement of people goods and capital”.

He concluded with the note, “Japan believes that it is a common perception that modulator cooperation is essential to overcome various challenges. Japan will continue to join hands with all the like-minded partners in the Indian Ocean region for the stability and peace of the region”

### **Nguyen Quoc Dzung Vice Foreign Minister, Vietnam**

Vietnam Vice Foreign Minister Dzung highlighted the connection between Asia, the Middle East and Africa with Europe and the Americas through the Indian ocean’s critical sea lanes which serve as lifelines of international trade and the gateways.

He said, “linking world continents, states and people, the Indian ocean abundant resources has been the source of prosperity of the coastal communities since the ancient time”.

Mr Nguyen Quoc Dzung, Vice Foreign Minister, Vietnam, is speaking in the Plenary Session at the 5th Indian Ocean Conference 2021. [#IOC2021](#)  
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Vice Foreign Minister highlighted the rising importance of the oceans to the national security and development of many nations in the region. He said, “there is an imperative and urgent need to develop extensive and profound awareness of the significance of oceans through sustainable development and economic recovery”.

### **Bharat Raj Paudyal, Foreign Secretary, Nepal**

Nepal Foreign Secretary highlighted the equal relevance of theme for the coastal as well as landlocked countries and said, “the gravity of these challenges demands our collective actions more urgently than ever”

He added, “the looming climate crisis has not spared either Ocean or mountains. The sea level rises and ocean water gets more acidic on the one hand and on the other the high mountains are losing their snow covers. This is jeopardizing the lives and livelihoods of many marines as well as terrestrial biodiversity is fast deteriorating. Climate-induced disasters have engulfed coastal states and small islands as well as the mountains. This intrinsic linkage should be well considered while pursuing the goal for healthy oceans as imported by UN SDG 14”

Addressing the post-pandemic economic challenges, Nepal Foreign Secretary said, “landlocked developing countries are in need of international and regional support to enhance their capacity for reaping the benefits of the ocean including in the utilization of the marine resources under the high seas.”

### **Waseqa Ayesha Khan, Member of Parliament, Bangladesh**

Bangladesh MP shared her countries perspective and position in the combat against COVID 19 pandemic as well as the climate emergency. Her deliberations mostly focused on the Bangladesh government’s response to the pandemic as well as its impact on its economy.

She acknowledged the unprecedented devastation caused by the pandemic by which Bangladesh was severely impacted, both at the economic and health front. While she called the level of infections and death rates in Bangladesh modest, she termed the losses in the economic front as immense.

She concluded on the note that the pandemic and the climate emergency are both global phenomena. Therefore, necessary to coordinate a global coordinated global response.

### **Watch full video of the Plenary Session 3**

## **Plenary Session 4**

Plenary Session 4 further explored the different facets of the theme. Joined by **Ambassador Navdeep Suri**, Former Indian Ambassador to UAE, **Jeniffer Larson**, Deputy Assistant Secretary, US State Department, **Donald Lu**, Assistant Secretary of State, USA, **Mehmet Syfettin Erol**, President, ANKASAM, Turkey, Thailand’s Deputy Chief of Mission to UAE

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