

Pathfinder holds panel discussion with Thomas Vajda

The Pathfinder Foundation (PF), organized a panel discussion to meet with Thomas L. Vajda, visiting Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs of the Department of State.

The theme of the panel discussion was the 'US Indo - Pacific Vision & Sri Lanka's Role', where the components of the US economic and commercial strategy for the Indo - Pacific region were discussed.

Upon arrival, Acting PDAS Vajda was welcomed by Milinda Moragoda, Founder of Pathfinder Foundation. He briefed Vajda on the activities of the Foundation and the role played by the 'Centre for Indo - Lanka Initiatives', 'China-Sri Lanka Cooperation Studies Centre' and 'Centre for Law of the Sea' set up by the Foundation and the planned activities of PF.

After an introduction of the visiting dignitary and the role of PF in developing bilateral relations between Sri Lanka and the US by Bernard Goonetilleke, Chairperson of PF, Admiral Jayanath Colombage, Director of the Centre for Law of the Sea (CLS) made a presentation on Indo - Pacific Strategy and its relation to Sri Lanka and the work undertaken by the Foundation for maintaining a free and open Indian Ocean. Furthermore, based on the success achieved by conducting two 'Trincomalee' Consultation dialogues in 2017 and 2018 focusing on the freedom of maritime commerce, security and protecting the environment especially, in the Bay of Bengal, Admiral Colombage spoke of PF's forthcoming International Advisory Group (IAG) meeting



PDAS Vajda in discussion with Milinda Moragoda, Founder of Pathfinder Foundation. US Ambassador Alaina B. Teplitz, Deputy Chief Political Affairs Marcus Carpenter, Press Officer Nancy Van Horn and Foreign Affairs Officer Olivier Garaud, Bernard Goonetilleke, Chairperson of PF, Luxman Siriwardena, Executive Director also in picture

scheduled for March 18, 2019, as a prelude to the Indian Ocean Security Conference to be held later.

The IAG will be headed by former Foreign Secretary and National Security Advisor of India Amb. Shivshankar Menon and experts from Australia, China, France, India, Japan, Norway, Russia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, the UK and the USA.

PDAS Vajda, who is responsible for security and transnational affairs in the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs of the Department of State and oversees economic and security issues, strategic planning, and Congressional relations across the countries of South and Central Asia, spoke on the U.S. vision for the Indo - Pacific with a focus on Sri Lanka's important role in the region. Vajda said that the United States expects Sri Lanka to build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with countries throughout the region

and around the world, just as the United States does. Through its engagement under the Indo - Pacific framework, the United States seeks to partner with Sri Lanka to realize its vision as a regional hub and achieve broader growth, which means equal opportunity and gains for all.

He noted that the United States is looking beyond the 20th century infrastructure projects and seeks to help build 21st century societies based on innovation, shared prosperity, and sustainable growth. Moreover, while the United States is looking to the future, it also addresses the now. He stressed that one key priority under the Indo - Pacific strategy is to accelerate private - sector led economic growth including through US companies, which have a strong track record of sparking innovation and prosperity.

Prof. Sirimal Abeyratne, Professor of Economics, University of Colombo

presented an overview of the Sri Lankan economy. He said that South Asia is the fastest-growing region in the world, but connecting more with the West than within the region. However, Sri Lanka is not, or at least not yet, a contributor to that growth.

He also highlighted that Sri Lanka has the potential to perform as an international services hub in the region and that in this regard the government policy documents identified the country to grow as a services hub and that in fact the country already has performed well as a service sector-led economy.

Following the presentations, there was an opportunity for the participants, including media personnel to make comments and seek clarifications. Actg. PDAS Vajda was accompanied by US Ambassador Alaina B. Teplitz, Deputy Chief Political Affairs Marcus Carpenter, Press Officer Nancy VanHorn and Foreign Affairs Officer Olivier Garaud.