



FROM THE CHAIRMAN'S DESK

The term 'Indo-Pacific' has, in recent years, moved quite decisively from its origins within the discipline of 'biogeography' to the realms of 'geopolitics', and today the Indo-Pacific Region has emerged as the world's centre of gravity in the maritime domain. In spatial terms, the Indo-Pacific Region refers to a predominantly maritime space which, insofar as India is concerned, incorporates all littoral states of West Asia and Africa; goes right across the Indian Ocean in its entirety, envelops SE Asia (ASEAN), stretches into the Western Pacific to include the littorals of East and Northeast Asia (including North and South Korea, Japan and China), and even reaches across Australia and New Zealand into the sprawl of Southern Pacific Island nations. The vastness of the Indo-Pacific Region is explicit in the connection it provides three continents and a multitude of nations, all with differing perspectives and expectations from the region. Given the diversity and the maritime turmoil the Indo-Pacific Region is witnessing, we, at the National Maritime Foundation, decided to rebrand our Flagship conference. Accordingly, this year the Annual Maritime Power Conference was renamed as the Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue, referred to as the IPRD. The dialogue, first in a series of the Indian Navy's apex level conference on the Indo-Pacific was conducted in seamless partnership with the National Maritime Foundation as the knowledge partner, and the Indian Navy as the lead state agency.

This change, personified in the quip, *What's in a Name*, took us down a path which ended in amazing results. The host of questions to be answered were never ending. Some of the central questions included; What are the central nodes that might define the security dynamics of the Indo Pacific from India's perspective and the perspectives of its maritime neighbours? What are the more significant maritime challenges in this region and what ought to be India's strategies for risk-mitigation? Perhaps even more importantly, since every challenge is simultaneously an opportunity, what are the opportunities that present themselves before India's maritime policy-shapers, policy-makers, and, the practitioners of these policies? How could other regional players react to the geopolitical game-moves by India and other major players within the Indo-Pacific?

These questions and a host of other issues were deliberated during the two day conference under four themes. Firstly, the growth and vulnerabilities of maritime merchandise trade, whose environmentally-sensitive development is an important constituent of the Blue Economy. Secondly, regional connectivity-models such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the International North-South Transit Corridor, the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor, Project MAUSAM, and the Honourable Prime Minister's concept of SAGAR. The theme also encompassed the examination of regional maritime structures such as the IONS, IORA and WPNS for enhancing maritime cooperation. Thirdly, challenges of overall digitisation of maritime space and cyber malevolence of the maritime domain. In addition, pan-regional changes and challenges to the overall maritime environment of the Indo-Pacific were also debated. Fourthly, the role of maritime industry in enhancing holistic maritime-security, and avenues within both the private and the public sectors for joint venture partnerships across

region were discussed. The conference was well attended and attracted professionals across diverse fields, bonded by the lure of understanding and exploring the Indo-Pacific Region. We also came out with a number of policy recommendations meriting attention, which have been forwarded to the concerned policy makers and relevant authorities.

The seas around us are gaining new found importance as each day goes by and I have no doubt that the current century is the century of the seas for India, which is emerging as a resurgent maritime nation. The Indo-Pacific has emerged as a contiguous maritime space for greater maritime cooperation. Consequently, networking between navies, and maritime partnerships between countries of the region need to be strengthened to ensure, peace, prosperity and stability across the Indo-Pacific Region.

The success of the first Indo-Pacific Region Dialogue resulted in the 2018 Summer Edition of National Maritime Foundation's journal Maritime Affairs being converted into a special issue. This special issue, apart from papers presented in the dialogue, covers the takeaways from the speeches of prominent personalities, both Indian and from friendly nations, who graced the inaugural session. We at the National Maritime Foundation are looking forward to the second Indo-Pacific Region Dialogue scheduled in February 2019 and I am sure this would provide opportunity for enriching deliberations and some paradigm shifting insights into the challenges and opportunities across the Indo-Pacific.

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