

A special lecture on the “Role of Sri Lanka in South Asia and Beyond: Emerging new Contours” was delivered by Dr. Dinusha Panditaratne, Executive Director, Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute of Sri Lanka on 19 January 2018 at the Habitat Centre, New Delhi. The special lecture was organized by the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) in New Delhi.

At the inception the welcome remarks were made by Prof. Sachin Chaturvedi, Director General of the RIS and the session was chaired by Ashok Sajjanhar, former Indian Diplomat.

Dr. Panditharatne reflected on four emerging contours and Sri Lanka’s role in South Asia and beyond. She identified contours as;

- Sri Lanka in the centre of the Indian Ocean gaining a south asian geographic identity
- In the past focusing on political diplomacy, but now more towards economic diplomacy
- Strategically non-aligned, but cautious and actively engaging with regional powers
- Seeking to demonstrate that Sri Lanka follows regional and international norms.

The presentation encapsulated the discernible shifts in these characteristics. She noted that these four developments in Sri Lanka’s foreign relations are nascent, but generally positive. Pursued in combination, these developments will elevate Sri Lanka’s standing, while strengthening its neighbourhood relations. The experiences of successful small states like Singapore, the Netherlands and New Zealand, are instructive for Sri Lanka in this regard.

Dr. Panditaratne also noted in her lecture that, Sri Lanka is being rebranded in the present context in order to aspire to be major trading hub in Asia. Furthermore, she noted that Sri

Lanka has been able to bring its Free Trade Agreements (FTA) into force which in turn impacts positively to the rebranding process. She stated that economic diplomacy is given priority, adherence to the rule of law and good governance gave a new face to the rebranding process. Sri Lanka has also pursued non-alignment in the current context and non-alignment according to Sri Lanka's national interest. This has shaped the international norms within Sri Lanka's foreign policy and framing a South Asian geographic identity.

At the end of the special lecture, H. E. Mrs. Chitranganee Wagiswara, High Commissioner of Sri Lanka in India made special remarks referring to current developments in which she highlighted that Sri Lanka has to face many challenges. She emphasized that Sri Lanka is a resilient country and that Sri Lanka is developing the economy in order to play an important role as a hub in the region while pursuing political stability and promoting links with the international community. The High Commissioner referred to India's neighbourhood policy and Sri Lanka – India linkages which contributes to closer engagement between the two countries.

