

Institute of National Security Studies
Round Table Discussion on
**“COMBATTING HUMAN SMUGGLING AT SEA: AN ESCALATING
THREAT TO NATIONAL SECURITY”**

Press Release

Institute of National Security Studies (INSS), the premier think tank on national security established under the Ministry of Defence, organized a Round Table Discussion titled “Combatting human smuggling at sea: An escalating threat to national security” on Wednesday, 21st of September 2022, from 1400hrs to 1600hrs (IST) via Zoom. The Guest Speakers of the event were Rear Admiral Pujitha Vithana, USP, ndu, Deputy Director General, Sri Lanka Coast Guard, Commander Rangana Athukorala, psc, MSc (D&SS), MPS, BNavalSt (Maritime Warfare), Senior Staff Officer (Operation), Sri Lanka Coast Guard and Lieutenant Commander WC Rodrigo, Legal Officer, Sri Lanka Coast Guard. The moderator for this timely session was Rear Admiral Dimuthu Gunawardena RWP** RSP VSV USP nswc psc hdmc, Acting Director General and Director (Communications & Publications) of INSS. The audience comprised ministry officials, academics, researchers, policymakers, representatives from Sri Lanka Armed Forces, Sri Lanka Police, Sri Lanka Coast Guard and Civil Security Department. The moderator commenced the proceedings by explaining on how human smuggling has spread as a crime around the world and why people engage in smuggling activities which are non-conventional maritime security threat. Furthermore, he discussed human smuggling operations during the post-war period as well.

Subsequent to the introduction given by the moderator, the first Speaker Rear Admiral Pujitha Vithana commenced his presentation by giving a brief introduction of the Sri Lanka Coast Guard (SLCG). Accordingly, he discussed what is Coast Guard, its role and functions in combatting human smuggling in Sri Lanka. In addition, the organizing structure of the SLCG, their stakeholders, training modules and the facilities and capabilities including the staff, vessels and technologies that they have to conduct operations in relation to smuggling were discussed deeply. Next, Commander Rangana Athukorala brought out a clear insight on the area “Operational aspect of Sri Lanka Coast Guard on combatting human smuggling at sea” and discussed the anti-smuggling operations by ensuring maritime security and future plans of the SLCG in combatting human smuggling. He presented statistical data on apprehended illicit emigrants from 2009 to 2022 by gender and nationality. Thereby, he asserted that illicit migration was recorded high during the periods of 2011-2013 and 2021-2022 and Tamil and male counterparts were higher among them. Furthermore, he pointed out the tactics of human smugglers, dangerousness of the voyage and the measures that they have taken for countering smuggling activities in Sri Lanka. The final speaker, Commander WC Rodrigo presented the legal aspect of combatting human smuggling at sea. He explained, the legal provisions on human smuggling in Sri Lanka Coast Guard Act No. 41 of 2009 and the Immigration and Emigration Act. Furthermore, he highlighted that trafficking and smuggling protocols is yet to be ratified by Sri Lanka. Consequentially, an interesting and interactive Q and A session took place, where Captain Nirmal Silva, Harbor Master, Sri Lanka Ports Authority too contributed to the session by sharing on how the merchant Navy could assist the Coast Guard. He also, shared his own experience on illegal migration using containers in merchant ships.