Major Narcotics Seizure in the Western Indian Ocean:

Operation Sea Shield I & II underscores Strength of Regional Maritime Cooperation

The **Regional Coordination Operations Centre (RCOC)** and the **Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC)**, under the framework of the **Regional Maritime Security Architecture (RMSA)**, successfully led **Operation Sea Shield I & II**—a landmark maritime security operation that delivered one of the largest narcotics interdictions in the Western Indian Ocean in recent years.

Conducted between **May and June 2025**, the operation resulted in the **seizure of over 1.5 tonnes of narcotics**, including **770 kg of heroin and methamphetamine off the coast of Sri Lanka** and **310 kg off Mozambique**, striking a significant blow to transnational drug trafficking networks operating across the region.

The success of the operation was made possible through unprecedented regional coordination, real-time intelligence sharing, and operational leadership from the two regional centres. Over ten countries took part in the operation, including Seychelles, Mauritius, Kenya, Madagascar, and Comoros - all RMSA members - alongside key regional partners such as India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Tanzania, and Mozambique.

The initiative was supported under the **Safe Seas Africa** (SSA) programme, implemented by the **Indian Ocean Commission** (IOC) and funded by the **European Union**, reaffirming international confidence in the region's ability to safeguard its maritime domain.

The operation focused on monitoring and interdicting three **high-risk Iranian dhows—*GALVATRON*, *IGOR*, and *EJECTOR*** - suspected of being primary carriers within a transnational narcotics trafficking network. A combination of **aerial surveillance**, **coast guard and naval deployments**, and **near real-time information exchange** enabled the region to track these vessels across thousands of nautical miles.

Despite challenging weather during the southeast monsoon transition, national and regional assets - including the **MCGS Valiant**, **Seychelles' Dornier aircraft**, and **Sri Lanka Navy vessels** - played pivotal roles in identifying and, in some cases,

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interdicting the suspect dhows. Continuous monitoring and vessel behavior analysis by RMIFC enabled rapid operational decisions and enhanced **maritime domain awareness (MDA)**.

Regional Unity and Operational Leadership

The operation marked a **milestone in regional cooperation**, not only under the RMSA but also through the engagement of non-member states. Countries coordinated their deployments and shared actionable intelligence with the regional centres, reinforcing the **RCOC's central role as a trusted hub** for maritime operations.

"*Operation Sea Shield is a clear demonstration of what we can achieve when we work as one region*," said **Captain Sam Gontier**, Director of RCOC. "T*he success of this operation is a direct result of timely intelligence, operational trust, and coordinated action under a unified maritime security architecture*."

While the operation delivered strong tactical outcomes, it also revealed critical operational insights - notably the need for clearer legal frameworks governing interdictions at sea, the deployment of embedded legal officers to support swift post-seizure actions, and the enhancement of aerial surveillance capabilities.

A Turning point for the Region

The outcome of **Operation Sea Shield I & II** marks a turning point, catalyzing discussions around future operations, integrated surveillance systems, and stronger political commitment to the RMSA. The success of this operation demonstrates a shift from dependence on external actors to a **region-led approach to maritime security**.

The **RCOC and RMIFC** extend their sincere appreciation to all participating countries, agencies, and partners for their dedication. The operation not only sets a **new standard for maritime collaboration** but also lays the foundation for a **more secure, resilient, and resilient Western Indian Ocean**.

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