

India-Sri Lanka Bilateral Cooperation

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India-Sri Lanka Bilateral Cooperation: Key Highlights

Context:

Recently, Sri Lankan President **Anura Kumara Dissanayake** held bilateral talks with India's Prime Minister during a **three-day visit to India**.

Political Significance

- This visit highlights the **strength of India-Sri Lanka relations**, as it marks Mr. Dissanayake's **first foreign trip** after becoming President.
 - The Ministry of External Affairs released the "**India-Sri Lanka Joint Statement: Fostering Partnerships for a Shared Future**."
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Key Outcomes of the Visit

1. Strategic & Defence Cooperation

- **Strengthened SAGAR Vision:** Supports **Security and Growth for All in the Region** and India's **Neighbourhood First** policy.
- **Countering China:** Helps contain **China's growing presence** in the Indian Ocean, including cases like the docking of Chinese ships at Hambantota Port.
- Provision of a **Dornier aircraft** to Sri Lanka for maritime surveillance.

2. Energy Cooperation

- **Electricity Grid Connectivity:** Establishing a grid and a **multi-product petroleum pipeline** between the two nations.
- Implementation of the **solar power project in Sampur**, with plans to enhance capacity as per Sri Lankan requirements.

3. Economic & Development Cooperation

- **Example Projects:**
 - **Indian Housing Project** (Phases III & IV).
 - **Hybrid Renewable Energy Projects** on three islands.
 - **High-Impact Community Development Projects** across Sri Lanka.
- **Debt Restructuring:**

- Emergency financing and **\$4 billion forex support** from India to stabilize Sri Lanka's economy.

4. Cultural & Tourism Development

- Resumption of flights between **Chennai and Jaffna**.
- Discussion on the **Ramayana Circuit and Buddhist Circuit** to boost tourism.
- Launching a **ferry service between Rameshwaram and Talaimannar** to enhance connectivity.

5. Digital Infrastructure

- Expedited implementation of the **Sri Lanka Unique Digital Identity (SLUDI) Project**.
- Expansion of **UPI digital payments** to promote financial transactions across borders.

6. Training & Capacity Building

- Agreed to train **1,500 Sri Lankan civil servants** across ministries over five years.

7. Fishermen Issues

- Acknowledged livelihood challenges faced by fishermen on both sides and emphasized a **humanitarian approach** to resolve disputes.

India's Role in Sri Lanka's Economic Crisis

- **Humanitarian Assistance:** Extended **\$4 billion in aid** during Sri Lanka's 2022 crisis for fuel, food, and essential imports.
- **Loan Assistance:** Provided short-term loans and facilitated **IMF negotiations** to support Sri Lanka's economic recovery.

Strategic Importance of Sri Lanka for India

- **Indian Ocean Security:** Sri Lanka's location is vital for **maritime security**, especially to counter **China's influence**.
 - Example: Concerns over **Hambantota Port**, leased to China.
- **Defence Cooperation:** Agreed to explore a **framework agreement** for joint exercises, maritime surveillance, and defence dialogues.

Challenges in India-Sri Lanka Relations

- **Tamil Issue:** India advocates the **full implementation of the 13th Amendment** to ensure Tamil autonomy through Provincial Councils.
- **Chinese Influence:** Docking of **Chinese military vessels** in Sri Lankan ports raises security concerns.
- **Fishermen Disputes:** Frequent clashes and arrests over poaching in shared waters.

Path Ahead

1. **Economic Integration:** Finalize the **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** to boost trade and investment.
 2. **Strategic Challenges:** Strengthen **maritime partnerships** to counterbalance China.
 3. **Tamil Reconciliation:** Collaborate to expedite devolution and improve living conditions for Tamils.
 4. **Sustainable Energy:** Expand renewable energy projects for mutual benefits.
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Conclusion

India-Sri Lanka relations, deeply rooted in history and geography, present opportunities for **economic, cultural, and strategic cooperation**. Addressing challenges through an **inclusive and balanced approach** will ensure a strong partnership in the **Indian Ocean Region**.



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