

India-Sri Lanka Relations

The Ramayana is the source of the oldest reference to Sri Lanka. With the aid of Hanuman, Ram could free Sita, who had been imprisoned in Lanka by Ravana. The relationships date back to the early days of Buddhism. About 2000 years ago, the Buddhist movement began to spread throughout Sri Lanka. India's economy has been closely connected with the north and northeast of Sri Lanka.

- More than 2,500 years have passed since the beginning of India and Sri Lanka's relations.
- Intellectual, cultural, religious, and linguistic exchanges have a long history between the two nations.
- In May 2009, the Sri Lankan military and the LTTE declared an end to their nearly three-decade-long war. Throughout the conflict, India backed the Sri Lankan government's right to take action against terrorist groups.
- Close contacts at all levels have characterised the partnership in recent years. The growth of trade and investment has been accompanied by collaboration in infrastructure building, education, culture, and defence.
- The connection between the two nations has been strengthened in recent years by notable advancements in developing aid initiatives.

India Sri Lanka Political Relations

Sri Lanka's domestic politics and international ties are highly geopolitical, with foreign countries having vested interests. The nation has been accused of violating human rights after emerging from a civil conflict. High-level exchanges of visits at regular intervals have been a defining feature of India and Sri Lanka political relations.

- Maithripala Sirisena, the then-elected president of Sri Lanka, made his first official trip to India in February 2015, and Modi later visited Colombo again in March of the same year. In 28 years, Modi was the first Indian prime leader to travel alone to Sri Lanka.
- During his maiden foreign trip to Sri Lanka in June 2019, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a significant symbolic gesture that reflected the unique relationship between the two nations.
- Sri Lanka participates in regional organisations such as BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) and SAARC, where India holds a prominent position.
- India had extended an invitation to BIMSTEC member state leaders to attend Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his council of ministers' oath-taking in 2019. The government's emphasis on its "Neighborhood First" strategy was in sync with this.
- Although Sri Lanka has traditionally been in India's geopolitical sphere, its ties to China have become stronger in recent years.
- Former President Rajapaksa brought Sri Lanka closer to China while downplaying Indian concerns, such as rehabilitating Tamil refugees from the protracted civil war in Sri Lanka.

India Sri Lanka Relations: Commercial and Economic Ties

Throughout the years, the economic and commercial relationship between India and Sri Lanka has grown significantly. Trade between the two nations increased dramatically after the India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISFTA) was implemented in 2000.

- For years, Sri Lanka has been a top choice for Indian direct investment.
- Among the SAARC nations, Sri Lanka is one of India's biggest commercial partners. India is Sri Lanka's top international trading partner.
- In 2015–17, India exported \$5.3 billion to Sri Lanka while importing \$743 million from that nation.
- Following the March 2000 implementation of the India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement, trade between the two nations increased quickly.
- While Sri Lankan exports to India have significantly expanded over the past few years after ISFTA went into effect in 2000.
- The investments are spread throughout various industries, including the manufacturing of tyres, cement, glass, infrastructure development, hospitality & tourism, banking, IT, financial services, real estate, telecommunication, and food processing (tea & fruit juices).
- The greatest source market for Sri Lankan tourism is India, which serves as another crucial link in the tourism chain connecting the two countries. Every fifth traveller comes from India, making it the country that contributes the most to the industry.
- The trade balance has widened due to a significant increase in India's exports to Sri Lanka. This is mostly due to Sri Lanka's limited ability to export goods to meet Indian demand as well as to a rise in imports from India as a result of the exports' competitiveness.
- The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which is still pending between the two nations, aims to build on the momentum created by the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and move the two economies beyond trade in goods toward greater integration as well as give bilateral economic cooperation new life and synergy.

India Sri Lanka Relations: Cultural and Educational Aspects

Periodic Cultural Exchange Programmes between the two nations are based on the Cultural Cooperation Agreement that the two Governments signed on November 29, 1977.

By providing classes in Indian music, dance, Hindi, and yoga, the Indian Cultural Centre in Colombo actively promotes understanding of Indian culture. Cultural groups from both nations exchange visits each year.

- The India-Sri Lanka Foundation, established in December 1998 as an intergovernmental initiative, also seeks to improve scientific, technical, educational, and cultural cooperation through civil society exchanges and increasing contact between the young people of the two nations.
- Through collaborative efforts, India and Sri Lanka marked the 2600th anniversary of Lord Buddha achieving enlightenment (Sambuddhathva Jayanthi).
- In 2014, the two governments also commemorated Anagarika Dharmapala's 150th birthday.
- Cooperation is crucial in the field of education. Currently, India provides 290 scholarships to Sri Lankan students each year.
- Additionally, India provides 370 spots yearly to citizens of Sri Lanka through the Colombo Plan and the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Scheme.
- In an effort to foster more interpersonal interaction, the Indian government formally introduced the e-Tourist Visa (eTV) programme for travellers from Sri Lanka on April 14, 2015.

Defence and Security Cooperation Between India and Sri Lanka

Significant training and Service-to-Service relationships are the cornerstones of an expanding defence alliance between India and Sri Lanka. The fact that both countries have comparable concerns, particularly those pertaining to the safety and security of their communication sea lanes, has an impact on their bilateral conversations in this area.

- India and Sri Lanka conducts joint Military 'Mitra Shakti' and Naval exercise (SLINEX).
- The Sri Lankan military is also trained by India in defence.
- India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives have joined hands to boost surveillance, anti-piracy operations, and maritime pollution control in the Indian Ocean region by signing a trilateral maritime security cooperation pact.
- Additionally, an agreement on combating human and drug trafficking was signed in April 2019 between India and Sri Lanka.

India Sri Lanka Relations: Major Issues and Conflicts

Despite having friendly relations in the past, there have been numerous occurrences in recent years that have damaged existing connections between India and Sri Lanka. The primary element that have aggravated tensions between the two nations include the fishermen issues.

Fisherman Issue

- Because the territorial waters of the two nations are so close together, particularly in the Palk Straits and the Gulf of Mannar, incidences of fisherman wandering off are frequent.
- Before 1974 and 1976, when treaties were made between the two countries to demarcate the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL), Indian vessels had unfettered access to the disputed waters and have been fishing in them for generations. These waters include the Bay of Bengal, Palk Bay, and the Gulf of Mannar.
- On the other side of the IMBL was the tiny islet of Katchatheevu, which they had previously used to sort their fish and dry their nets.
- The catch from Sri Lanka is superior in terms of quantity and quality (high-value prawns). However, the Sri Lankan Navy is on watch and has either arrested or destroyed the fishing nets and vessels of individuals who have crossed the line. Fishermen frequently take a risk and cross the IMBL rather than return empty-handed.
- The problem began because Sri Lankan fisherman lost their catch and their vessels were damaged as a result of Indian fishermen using mechanised trawlers.
- There has been a long-standing issue with Sri Lankan authorities arresting Indian fishermen on the Sri Lankan side of the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) in the Palk Straits and the Gulf of Mannar while the Sri Lankan Navy is firing on Indian fishing vessels.
- In order to address the problem of legitimate fisherman from either side breaching the international maritime boundary line, both nations have come to certain practical agreements.
- These agreements have made it possible to approach the problem of the incarceration of fishermen in a humane way.
- As a means of assisting in the resolution of the fishermen's issue, India and Sri Lanka have agreed to establish a Joint Working Group (JWG) on Fisheries between the Ministries of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare of India and Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Development of Sri Lanka.

Some other recent issues that have been affecting the India Sri Lanka relations include:

- China had been given a 99-year lease by Sri Lanka on the vital Hambantota Port. The security establishment in India was concerned about China using the Hambantota port for military operations, despite the fact that they assumed control of the port by portraying themselves as doing commercial operations. Chinese submarines have recently been sighted in Hambantota Port.
- The joint venture with India to manage the Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport has not progressed as planned. The China-run Hambantota port is not distant from Mattala Airport.
- In recent decades, bilateral relations have been badly harmed by the protracted conflict in Sri Lanka between the majority Sinhala and the minority Tamil populations. Sri Lankan war crimes investigations and challenges with accountability are also a part of the problem.
- The Sampur Thermal Power Station Project, which is located in Sri Lanka's Eastern Province, was meant to be undertaken by Indian Public Sector Undertaking National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC). The project was abandoned because of environmental concerns.

